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# CLAREMONT
## REVIEW OF BOOKS

*A Journal of Political Thought and Statesmanship*

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FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

# Bring Back the Constitution

by Charles R. Kesler

Though it has begun in earnest, the presidential race is not yet serious. It's still in that early stage when the candidates introduce themselves on the basis of their biography and the offices they've held, as if they were running for student body president. There is no significant policy debate.

Enjoy it while it lasts. The contest's next phase has a way of reducing the candidates to policy wonks, especially the Democrats, who in order to mobilize their disparate supporters must advance long, specialized agendas. Goodbye, "the audacity of hope." Hello, the hope of audacity, of any sort of bold Democratic policy addressing the common good rather than client groups.

Republicans have a hard time competing against such pandering, but that won't stop them from trying. The best way to avoid this race to the bottom is to connect Republican policies to the Constitution and its principles. Thinking about the Constitution as a guide to policy has almost gone out of style, except in the appointment of judges and the current debate over war powers, a welcome throwback, in its way. One would have to go back to the Reagan era, and before that to the 1960s, to find Republican leaders opposing major government programs on constitutional grounds.

But the alternative to reviving constitutionalism is to make policy with no limits except for the judges' whims, and with no guide except our leaders' visions, distilled from their constituents' desires. The alternative to constitutionalism, in other words, is to play politics according to the Democrats' rules. That's a losing game.

Here are some issues where conservative candidates might start to change the rules and play a winning game, beginning with national defense. Granted, you cannot deduce defense policy from the Constitution, but it does convey a sense of priorities and the means (an energetic executive) to pursue them.

National defense is the national government's most urgent and fundamental priority. But as Robert Samuelson noted recently, defense spending is only a fifth of the federal budget; in 1956, during a peaceful part of the Cold War, it was 60% of the budget. Social welfare spending (counting Social Security and Medicare) has moved in the opposite direction. It was a fifth of the budget in 1956; today, it is three times that percentage, and climbing. While waging a multi-front war, the Bush Administration has done all it can to hold down defense spending and the size of the armed forces. Partly, this is the result of its faith that with high technology and transformed forces, more could be done with less. Partly, however, the administration fears being backed into a tax increase, or unpopular reductions in spending, or both.

But conservatives ought to do better than that. National defense is central to constitutionalism in a way that entitlement spending is not. Defense spending needs to grow dramatically, and if that forces a hard look at entitlements and domestic discretionary spending, all the better.

Or consider abortion. conservatives favor overturning *Roe v. Wade*. Even Rudy Giuliani, who says he favors appointing "strict-constructionist" jurists like John Roberts, Antonin Scalia, and Samuel Alito, therefore implicitly favors overturning *Roe*, despite his professed belief in a woman's "right to choose." If it overturned that arrogant decision, however, a strict-constructionist Supreme Court would not replace it with a new, judicially created regime outlawing abortions; in all likelihood it would return the issue to the state legislatures.

Conservatives should talk more about the constitutional outcome they seek by invalidating *Roe*. In essence, they favor a return to the status quo ante, in which abortion is primarily a matter of state law. This federalist outcome would mean that Iowa and South Carolina would not have to have the same abortion law as New York. Abortion would be illegal in some states, legal in others. Though not ideal, this situation is morally and politically better than the current thralldom to abortion on demand, and it does not preclude continued agitation for the Human Life Amendment or its equivalent.

By emphasizing federalism as the way forward on abortion, conservatives would emphasize their own constitutional fidelity and moderation, redirect our court-centric politics, and undermine the Left's doomsday fear-mongering.

A constitutionalist agenda would embrace other conservative causes, but it would change the tone, and to some extent the substance, of the arguments. In addition, it would raise new issues to the fore. Will future citizens revere the Constitution as they should? Will immigrants regard it, and the language in which it's written, as focal points of civic unity?

Bringing the Constitution back would at least lend the 2008 race a presidential seriousness and focus. The new occupant of the Oval Office will swear, after all, to "preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution of the United States."

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# CORRESPONDENCE

## Gordon Wood Reconsidered

Much could and should be said in praise of Steven F. Hayward's careful consideration of Gordon Wood's historical *oeuvre*, but it is also true that in certain regards Hayward misses the mark ("The Liberal Republicanism of Gordon Wood," Winter 2006/07). He is right, for example, to highlight the use to which a great many law professors have put the opening and closing chapters of Wood's first book, *The Creation of the American Republic*; he is admirably sensitive to the manner in which Wood's later work, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution*, signals a change in perspective on his part; and he is correct in noting that Wood thinks the legal Left's appropriation of his work utterly wrong-headed. But he misses the chief reason why Wood rejects their overtures. Wood's original view—jettisoned, I believe, in his second book—was that the Revolution was initially anti-capitalist, and it would be correct to call his stance at that time neo-Beardian. But, even then, he refrained from making the jump from the putative communitarianism of the revolutionary generation to the notion that they would have embraced the administrative state subsequently championed by Mark Siedenfeld, Morton Horwitz, Cass Sunstein, and the like. These legal scholars may entertain the notion that there is something communitarian about the modern bureaucratic state. Wood understands and has always understood that this presumption is preposterous. Whether the revolutionary generation was ever genuinely communitarian in its orientation can be debated (and has been). No one can argue, however, that they were friendly to the state and its functionaries as such, and Wood's account makes it perfectly clear that from the start, in political matters, jealousy was their watchword.

In similar fashion, Hayward is on the mark when he criticizes Wood's understanding of the discussion of virtue that took place in the founding period, when he attacks him for neglecting the significance of the Declaration of Independence, and when he faults his assault on the very idea of original intent. In general, in his work, Wood fails to weigh the relative significance of pronouncements, treating everything said, whether public or private, whether official or partisan, as equally significant. He is loath to contemplate the possibility that some of the arguments presented in the revolutionary period were profoundly insightful, had a decisive impact, and might even have permanent significance. This failing derives from the species of intellectual historicism which links his work with that of his teacher, Bernard Bailyn, and which renders it almost indistinguishable from the linguistic historicism of J.G.A. Pocock, Quentin Skinner, and the other adherents of the so-called Cambridge School. Those who, in the name of scholarly objectivity, resolutely treat argument as ideology are destined to discount the significance of argument and to misapprehend the nature of politics.

But if Hayward is correct in most of what he says, he is wrong in one crucial particular. Wood's "enduring appeal" does not derive from the discussion of "republicanism" in the early chapters of *The Creation of the American Republic*. Nor does it owe anything to the discussion of "liberalism" in the final chapters of that work. Among historians, at least, the argument with which Wood framed that book is regarded as passé—and rightly so. For what remains valuable—and perhaps invaluable—are the chapters in between, which form the core of the book. These deal with the experiments in the constitution of republican government conducted within the states in the period stretching from 1776 to 1787, with the debates that took place in this period concerning the political architecture proper for a modern republic, with the calling of the Federal Convention, and with the framing and ratification of the Constitution. These chapters, which Hayward does not even mention, are splendid; and, in the book concealed within his book, one can see Wood treating statesmanship and human reflection at the highest level with something approaching the respect that it deserves. When faced with genuine grandeur, to his very great credit, he simply cannot help himself.

There is one other point that should be made. Bernard Bailyn, Gordon Wood, Edmund Morgan, John Murrin, Jack Greene—the historians of yesteryear who illuminated the American Revolution and the American Founding—are all now retired or semi-retired, and with one exception have not been replaced. Ten years ago, I was a visiting professor at Yale University. In order to teach a lecture course on the American Revolution, I had to submit a syllabus and propose a brand new course: none on this subject, I was told, had been taught in the decade that had passed since Edmund Morgan had retired. On campus after campus, the subject has been quietly dropped; and where it has not been dropped, it soon will be, as the older generation passes from the scene, for it has become almost as unfashionable as military and diplomatic history. The only really important book published in this field since the beginning of the new millenium—Max Edling's *A Revolution in Favor of Government*—was started in England and finished on the European continent by a Swede. Whatever defects we may be inclined to attribute to Gordon Wood and the other titans of the generation now retired, this much must be said: they had a better grasp of the central importance of statesmanship—especially, statesmanship at the highest level—than do those who now strut and fret upon the academic stage, ranting piously and pompously about gender, race, and class. One need only survey recent issues of *The William and Mary Quarterly*, the principal journal devoted to early American history, to see just how bad things have become.

**Paul A. Rahe**
University of Tulsa
Tulsa, OK

*Steven F. Hayward replies:*

I do not have much of a quarrel, nor do I want one, with the one person who has covered the entire space-time continuum of republicanism far beyond Gordon Wood's compass—especially since Professor Rahe affirms my chief criticism concerning Wood's intellectual historicism. About Rahe's specific complaint that I have misattributed the best reason for Wood's enduring appeal, I want merely to reiterate that while Wood's thesis may be "passé" among academic historians, it is still *au courant* among intellec-

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tuals in other fields, especially law and the "civic republican revival" advertised in such political thinkers as Michael Sandel. I accept Rahe's criticism that I neglected to give due weight and consideration to *Creation*'s fine middle chapters. One of the things that rankles about the use and abuse of Wood in other fields is that most of the time it seems as though none of the people who appeal to Wood has actually read with care *any* of his chapters—raising the ironic specter that Wood is being treated with the same intellectual historicism with which he himself approached the American Founding.

## Shakespeare and Postmodernism

Paul Cantor's cover essay, "Playwright of the Globe," contrasting real people's continuing appreciation of Shakespeare with the abuse meted out by the suicide bombers of the literary criticism establishment, is especially welcome (Winter 2006/07). Ever the gentleman, Cantor leaves open the possibility that they are simply mistaken about a complex matter (having "a false conception of culture"), whereas I regard them as either fools or knaves, or most likely, both.

The point I wish to make concerns the implicit or explicit historicism of these pseudo-scholars whose stock-in-trade is debunking. As Cantor puts it, "the idea [is] that all thought is not simply *conditioned* by historical circumstances but is actually *determined* by them," adding that "in its strict and only logically consistent form, historicism must—and usually does—insist on the uniqueness of all cultures." Actually, the logic of its premises terminates in complete solipsism, for no two persons of any given time and place *fully* share identical experiences, attitudes, feelings, and education, such as would bind them together in a mutual but exclusive understanding of each other and the world. Simply imagine a suitable variety of "Elizabethans"—Warwickshire dairy maid, Thames boatman, old Oxford don, young Cornish tin miner, rich London mercer, poor London trollop, Sheriff of Nottingham, Lord Chancellor, Queen's Lady, the Queen herself—all may speak English of a sort, but if the premises that supposedly make "cultures" unique and in principle unintelligible to each other were valid, each person would be, following Plato's famous analogy, a "cave" unto himself, with no exit (such as that provided by dialogue with others, especially with the best and brightest of other places and times).

Thus, if Lit-Crit's High Priests understood the implications of their historical-cultural relativism, *and* actually took them seriously—as the fools do not the former, and the knaves do not the latter—they would have to admit that anything they claimed about Shakespeare's views, about the times in which he lived, and any supposed relationship between the two, would necessarily be intellectually worthless. For with their being as hermetically sealed in their own corner of space and time, as they allege Shakespeare to have been in his, these would be things they could not possibly *know* anything about. Their understanding would necessarily be, virtually by their own definition, a *misunderstanding*, though of indeterminable relation to the historical reality about which they presume to speak—pointlessly, then, one must add. Ironic enough that they profess to be experts on something which, were their belittling treatments to be believed, would not be worthy of expertise. When their radically relativistic theories of culture and knowledge are applied *reflexively*—as intellectual probity demands—all their claims dissolve into incoherent mush. Thus it is with all radically relativistic epistemologies. A logical nicety too subtle, apparently, for those who find the postmodern mindset so satisfying to their vanity.

**Leon Harold Craig**
University of Alberta
Edmonton, Alberta
Canada

## Getting Original Intent Right

The *Claremont Review of Books* (Winter 2006/07), under the heading of "The Disputed Question," published my critique of Professor Michael Uhlmann's review in a previous issue of a book entitled *Originalism in American Law and Politics* by Johnathan O'Neill. I objected to Uhlmann's indiscriminate praise (as I thought) of a book that celebrated an "original intent" jurisprudence that was utterly alien to those who framed and ratified the original Constitution. The Constitution is in crisis because—as Professor Uhlmann and I agree—constitutional law has become almost entirely estranged from the Constitution. Liberal activist justices have been encouraged by the idea of a "living Constitution" to say what the law ought to be rather than what it is. The late Chief Justice William Rehnquist, followed by Justice Antonin Scalia, Judge Robert Bork, and many of the legal scholars considered conservative, have adopted what they call a jurisprudence of "original intent" as a counter to the "living Constitution."

The meaning of genuine original intent was however set forth by Abraham Lincoln, in his commentary on the verse from Proverbs, "A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver."

> The assertion of that principle ('that all men are created equal') was the word 'fitly spoken' that has proved an 'apple of gold' to us. The Union and the Constitution are the pictures of silver, subsequently framed around it. The picture was made, not to conceal or destroy the apple, but to adorn or preserve it. The picture was made for the apple—not the apple for the picture.

As Lincoln said, the relationship of the Declaration and the Constitution was one of ends and means. To deny the integrity of the two together is to leave the Constitution open to whatever ends or purposes the Court might wish. This is the essence of the doctrine of the "living Constitution."

What Prof. Uhlmann and I do not agree upon is why liberal judicial activism (the "living Constitution") has been so successful, and why the appeal by conservative justices to a jurisprudence of original intent has been such a failure. His admission that the conservatives' rejection of the Declaration undercuts the metaphysical ground of their originalism is altogether inadequate. In fact, their rejection of the Declaration undercuts not only the metaphysical but the *moral* foundation of the Constitution. Without the distinction between the *principles* of the Constitution and the *compromises* of the Constitution no moral case *for* originalism is possible, nor is any case possible *against* the living constitution. Unless conservative jurists can break out of this box, and restore to constitutional interpretation its Lincolnian integrity, the Union Lincoln saved will face a disintegration from within, at least as deadly as that represented by *Dred Scott*, secession, and slavery.

**Harry V. Jaffa**
Claremont, CA

## The Civil War's Lost Cause

Professor Glen Thurow wants to know why in my book I do not come down clearly on "the cause" of the Civil War, exonerating the Union and excoriating the Confederacy ("God of Battles," Winter 2006/07). But this is an issue that poses a real ethical question without criteria for definitive judgments. In civil wars, where significant numbers of belligerent citizens align themselves under warring banners, with substantial territories and competent leadership on both sides, it often becomes difficult to discern with finality who is the unjust aggressor and who the just defender.



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Who is right and who is wrong in Iraq's civil war? The Shia? The Sunnis? Did Norway have a right to secede from Sweden? Does modern-day Chechnya have a right to secede from Russia? These are moral issues that recur in civil wars throughout the years, with no definitive answers. Did the South have a right to secede from the North? Yes. And no. Only a civil war would determine the answer.

Although he never takes a stand, I suspect Thurow thinks otherwise. He would like me to judge the Confederate case for a defensive war as unjust. But to my thinking, this argument is only incontrovertible if one ascribes a transcendent—even mystical—holiness to the Union as "God's New Israel." Northern evangelical Republicans certainly had no problem with this premise during the war and used it frequently to justify their cause (as did the South in virtually identical language for their Confederacy). But speaking for myself, such a perspective is absurd, if not downright idolatrous. Lying at the center of my argument, alongside just war judgments, is an account of how the war was sacralized into the occasion for a full-blown nondenominational civil religion, existing alongside of and equal in power to Christian and Jewish denominations.

Thurow apparently has no problem with any instances of unjust conduct in the Civil War (at least by the North). War, as General William Tecumseh Sherman observed, is hell. So get over it. What happened happened and the only moral issue of moment was the preservation of the Union. And here, given America's sacred destiny, no step was too draconian or immoral if it led to the triumph of the federal nation-state.

Where Thurow (following Lincoln) would like me to accept the war's conduct, and embrace "the cause," I can't. In his view this renders me a softie who would prefer a "genteel" war to total war. Well, so be it. I would rather have a genteel war with honor (and lose it if necessary) than a dirty war fought in a deliberately unjust manner.

In the end, Prof. Thurow's critique is a throwback to the old triumphalist good guy/bad guy histories of the Civil War in which the South is so utterly wrong because of slavery and the North so utterly right because of emancipation (in the process ignoring Northern racism and Jim Crow utterly), that hard questions don't have to be addressed. And it is precisely this mentality that has empowered America to fight endless subsequent wars in the name of "freedom," without ever really engaging questions of just conduct and protection of innocents. Today, when our country is still bemused by its belief that 9/11 made and makes any and all anti-terrorist actions appropriate, one can see that if a leader so humane and noble as Lincoln could pay such small heed to the still, small voice of conscience, what can we expect of our present leadership? Pretty much what we are getting.

**Harry S. Stout**
Yale University
New Haven, CT

*Glen E. Thurow replies:*

It was not I, but Professor Stout, who claimed to be able to show us whether the Civil War was a just war on the part of either the North or the South. I did not argue that he should have exonerated the Union and excoriated the Confederacy, but rather that he ought to have engaged the arguments actually made by participants in the struggle. Instead of examining the causes of the American Civil War as understood at the time, Stout (as he makes clear in his letter) assumes from the beginning that it is impossible to determine who has justice on his side in any civil war. Hence he does not need to look at what actually led to this war, and doesn't, since he already knows that there could not possibly be a just cause involved. On the crucial question of whether the South had a right to secede, he says, "only a civil war would determine the answer." Might makes right?

In his letter he makes the astounding assertion that one might be able to find the Southern cause unjust only if one ascribes mystical holiness to the Union. Why does he not look at what people of the time actually argued? In his First Inaugural Address, Abraham Lincoln makes a very powerful argument, not that the seceding states were violating the holiness of the Union, but that their secession undermined the rule of law and was based on the principle of anarchy. The president might have been wrong, but if Stout wishes to write a serious moral analysis of the Civil War, he needs to confront Lincoln's argument.

Stout's confusions are nowhere more evident than in his judgment of Lincoln. On the one hand his Lincoln, by issuing the Emancipation Proclamation, not only turned the war into a semi-religious crusade resulting in the unjust deaths of tens of thousands, but forged a nation that has acted unjustly for 150 years afterwards. Yet, Stout says, the president was "humane and noble." He cannot have it both ways.

## The G.I. Bill

Thomas Bruscino begins his review of my book on the G.I. Bill with a cogent summary, but then he proceeds to dismiss my central finding: that veterans who benefited from the Bill's education and training provisions became particularly active citizens in postwar America ("No Soldier Left Behind," Winter 2006/07). He insists that these high rates of civic involvement must have emanated not from the G.I. Bill but rather from the military service that preceded it. He criticizes me, therefore, for not comparing veterans with non-veterans.

Bruscino may not be aware that other scholars (most notably, Kent Jennings and Gregory Markus) have already conducted such analyses. Contrary to what he expects, they have found that a record of military service does *not*, in itself, lead to heightened civic involvement. While many aspects of military service prepare servicemembers for subsequent civic involvement, as Bruscino and I both agree, evidently other aspects—perhaps associated with serving in combat—counteract these positive forces and actually reduce individuals' likelihood of participating.

My purpose was to compare individuals who were alike in all the regards we can measure but who differed in terms of whether or not they used the G.I. Bill for education or training. On that basis, I was able to isolate what turns out to be the striking and largely unintended civic effects of the policy. Through statistical analysis of hundreds of World War II veterans that I surveyed, I found that in comparing two non-black males with the same socio-economic background and same level of education—one who used the G.I. Bill for education or training and the other who did not—the G.I. Bill beneficiary proceeded to participate in 50% more civic organizations and 30% more political activities during the postwar era. On net, such effects yielded a powerful impact, given that, as Robert Putnam has noted, fully 80% of the males of the "civic generation" were veterans and among them about half used the G.I. Bill's education and training benefits. I do not claim that G.I. Bill usage functioned as a "silver bullet," by itself explaining the intense civic engagement of the postwar decades. Nonetheless, the provisions' effects in invigorating democracy in that era are impressive.

Compared to that period, when ordinary Americans felt connected to the political system and regularly made their voices heard to elected officials, participatory citizenship has declined sharply over recent decades, particularly among less advantaged individuals. No doubt the causes for this shift are multifaceted, but it makes sense to consider the role that public policies may play. Scholars have found that receiving Social Security benefits fosters higher rates of political involvement among low-income senior citizens than their other char-



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acteristics would lead us to expect; welfare receipt, conversely, appears to depress the likelihood of voting, even when controlling for other factors. The G.I. Bill still stands as one of America's landmark policies: it offered educational opportunity to those who had served the nation and it prompted their subsequent involvement as more active and vocal citizens.

**Suzanne Mettler**
Syracuse, NY

*Thomas A. Bruscino, Jr., replies:*

The fundamental flaw in Suzanne Mettler's thesis can be seen in her response to my review. She argues that there is little difference between veterans and non-veterans when it comes to civic participation, but that G.I. Bill recipients—all of whom were veterans—were "more active and vocal citizens." Which is it?

The answer, as I point out, can only be found in a thorough comparison of World War II veterans (G.I. Bill recipients and non-recipients) and non-veterans from the same age cohort. Research by Jeremy Teigen, Samuel Stouffer, and E.M. Schreiber has found statistically significant distinctions between World War II-era veterans and non-veterans in several areas, including voting participation, tolerance, and isolationism. (Jennings and Markus looked at Vietnam veterans, explicitly stating that their findings differed from studies on veterans of World War II.) This conclusion is at odds with Mettler's own preconceived notion that government welfare programs can make better citizens.

But even if we accept her findings and agree that G.I. Bill recipients participated more than veteran non-recipients, there is still a hole in the research: we have nothing to which to compare the results; *no non-veterans received G.I. Bill benefits*. And when non-World War II veterans have been on the receiving end of large government welfare programs, the results have been more than a little disappointing.

## The Coming Pandemic

Virtually everything passing for "fact" in Mark Helprin's scarifying essay on pandemic flu, "The Worst Generation Faces the Greatest Peril" (Fall 2006), was dispatched in my *Weekly Standard* cover story of November 21, 2005, "Fuss and Feathers: Pandemic Panic over the Avian Flu." The rest was dismissed in my follow-up in the December 25 issue, "The Chicken Littles Were Wrong: The Bird Flu Threat Flew the Coop." Further, Helprin's call for spending 2.5% of the national budget or about 1% of GDP to stave off this will o' the wisp, when defense spending has only gone up 0.8% of GDP since 9/11, is downright distressing.

The very idea of comparing a 1918-1919 pandemic (the Spanish Flu) to a 21st-century one is fatuous. Back then, antibiotics and antibacterial vaccines that could prevent the deaths caused by secondary infections were still decades away. Yet despite the myth that most people died directly from the virus in that pandemic, overwhelming evidence indicates that as with all flues it was opportunistic bacteria that ultimately killed the great majority of victims.

Helprin also ignores the existence of antivirals, even though we are now building huge stockpiles of two—Tamiflu and Relenza—that could be tremendously effective against avian flu H5N1 because they specifically target neuraminidase (the "N" part of the name.) Studies at St. Jude's Research Hospital have shown that H5N1 appears to express the highest level of neuraminidase of any flu since 1957, and that the drugs can effectively kill two birds with one stone by both preventing a person from getting the flu or, if they do get it, from transmitting it.

A review of four such studies in the *American Journal of Epidemiology* showed that preventive administration of Relenza reduced the chance of becoming infected by 75%, reduced the chance of transmission by 19%, and reduced the severity of illness by 52%. For Tamiflu, preventive administration reduced the chance of becoming infected by 81%, reduced the chance of transmission by 80%, and reduced the severity of illness by 56%.

Helprin warns of the possibility of reassortment, whereby humans (or one of the few types of animals that can contract human flu) also contract avian flu, and the two merge to form a super-hybrid, with the worst aspects of both. Yet H5N1 was first discovered in Scottish chickens in 1959 and has therefore had almost half a century to either reassort or mutate into a form readily transmissible between humans, yet has failed to do so. That hardly supports Helprin's exhortation that avian pandemic flu "will almost certainly strike in one form or another; it could strike tomorrow...."

A study using one of those few animal species, ferrets, appeared in the August 8, 2006 issue of *Proceedings of the National Academy of Scientists*. The ferrets were infected with several H5N1 strains in addition to a common human influenza virus that circulates almost every year. The infected animals were then either placed in the same cage with uninfected ferrets to test transmissibility by close contact, or in adjacent cages with perforated walls to test spread of the virus from respiratory droplets. None of the secondary ferrets received either a reassorted virus or even the H5N1, mimicking what we've seen in humans.

Separately, the scientists used gene splicing to create a hybrid virus. They found these hybrids also did not pass easily between the animals. Moreover, ferrets injected with the reassorted virus symptoms were less severely ill than were those who received pure H5N1. Reassortment appears to have weakened the virus.

Helprin claims the "mortality of Avian Flu has been calculated on the basis of isolated cases, the subjects of attentive care, and reads far lower" than if it went pandemic. In fact, the data of which he speaks all come from Third World countries with Third World medical practices and comprise only those who became sick enough to go to the hospital. As to the true death rate, a study of residents in a rural district in Vietnam published in January 2006 in the *Archives of Internal Medicine* found a mortality rate for those infected with avian flu of about 1 in 140 or 0.71%—the same range as seasonal human flu.

Meanwhile, at least six different drug companies have vaccines for H5N1 in testing or even in production while awaiting regulatory approval. At least one country has ordered enough for every citizen. Every day that passes doesn't bring us a bit closer to a pandemic, but rather closer to having ever larger and more effective stockpiles of drugs to both prevent and treat avian flu. If only this were true of our national security against the forces of Islamist terror. That's where the money he would throw down the gullet of the faux flu needs to go.

**Michael Fumento**
Arlington, VA

*Mark Helprin replies:*

Dare I defend myself from an attack so magisterial that it dispatched my arguments a year before I made them? And we can have no doubt that it did, because the author's authority is two articles that he himself wrote.

His arguments suggest both careless reading and careless writing. For example, he gratuitously assumes that other observers don't know that flu deaths are often caused by secondary infections, and that the "antibiotics and antibacterial vaccines" that did not exist at the time of the 1918 pandemic are sufficient to render these of no great import. Not all secondary infections are bacterial; a large proportion of deaths is caused directly by viral flu pathogens; and, in regard to the subcategory of bacterial secondary infections, resistance to antibiotics is so rapidly building that they cannot be an effective line of defense in a pandemic. Even if they



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could, in a mass outbreak medical personnel, equipment, and drugs themselves would not be available to the vast majority of patients.

Antivirals such as Tamiflu and Relenza are subject to the same degradation as antibiotics, as is shown by the steadily growing viral resistance to them in Japan. The government stockpile, assuming that it is not severely reduced by efforts to contain an outbreak somewhere else in the world, will not cover eight out of ten Americans. And what does it say about Mr. Fumento's argument that he is content because a study found that Relenza at one time reduced transmissibility (of which virus?) by 19%?

The claim that H5N1 has been known for half a century and has not reassorted into a dangerous variant ignores the immense increases in Chinese animal husbandry, reduction of waterfowl habitat, and other factors, which further opportunities for reassortment by orders of magnitude. Nor does it look beyond the H5N1 pathogen to the many others, known and unknown, that have arisen and will arise in such conditions. Yes, reassortment may weaken lethality, but it may not.

As for the assertion that the death rates in advanced countries would be low because of advanced medical care, in the absence of the necessary preparations I advocate, medical care would largely disappear within the first weeks of a mass outbreak, given the tight margins in the supply of hospital beds, ventilators, personnel, and drugs, as anyone who has ever waited in an emergency room would understand.

There is a broad range in estimations of mortality. Kathleen Gensheimer *et al.* in *Emerging Infectious Diseases* project "89,000–207,000 deaths" in the United States, and "Hundreds of thousands to millions [of casualties]." Sarah A. Lister of the Congressional Research Service cites "CDC estimates that, in the United States...a pandemic could cause more than 200,000 [deaths]." The World Health Organization (WHO) summarizes expert estimates for worldwide mortality as having "ranged from 2 million to over 50 million." Dr. Shigeru Omi, WHO director for Asia and the Pacific, in the *New York Times*, estimated "at least 2 to 7 million, maybe more—20 million or 50 million, or in the worst case, 100 million." Dr. Michael T. Osterholm, director of the University of Minnesota Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy, estimates that a pandemic could kill up to 1.7 million people in the U.S. and as many as 177 million worldwide. Henry L. Niman, Ph.D., president of Recombinomics, believes a pandemic could potentially kill a billion people if the 72% mortality rate seen in recent confirmed H5N1 cases prevailed.

The tremendous range of expert estimates is due to the uncertainty of the variables. The least "authoritative" in the samples above is also the highest, but the most "authoritative," that of the Center for Disease Control (CDC), was offered by Martin Meltzer, a health economist in the Office of Surveillance of the CDC's National Center for Infectious Diseases, who based his projections on the small-bore Hong Kong Flu of 1968, and calls his own numbers "conservatively low."

Nor is there consensus in regard to the death toll from the 1918-19 Influenza Pandemic, with a range of 20 million to 50 million deaths worldwide, and the usual citation of 500,000 deaths in the United States, although this latter figure has been elevated by some estimates to 675,000. An article in *Johns Hopkins Public Health* dismisses the lower estimates: "The global death toll from the 1918 flu was long pegged at 20 million, but most experts now think that grossly low. They talk of 50 million, perhaps 100 million."

It is possible that continuing research will extend the hopeful progress to date, and that the newly emerging pathogens will be (almost) neutralized by antiviral vaccines. But these vaccines are not available now, and Mr. Fumento's position has not been, is not, and will not apparently be favorable to allocation of the hundreds of millions and billions of dollars that are necessary to make them so, and that have brought the progress he cites as if it reinforces his line of reasoning.

What is most peculiar and arbitrary is that he apparently believes appropriations for the military and those for biological preparations are alien competitors, and that my call for spending $100 billion per year (which he wrongly calls 1% of GDP) would cripple defense. The roughly $5 billion planned for biological defenses is approximately one one-hundredth of what we have spent, thus far and over and above the defense budget, for the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Because the reassortment that he claims with no basis whatsoever will not occur in nature can be accomplished in the laboratory—yielding a wide variety of potential combinations (such as a pathogen with the lethality of Ebola and the transmissibility of the common cold)—biological defenses are obviously a very important part of the war, even if fatal to his argument.



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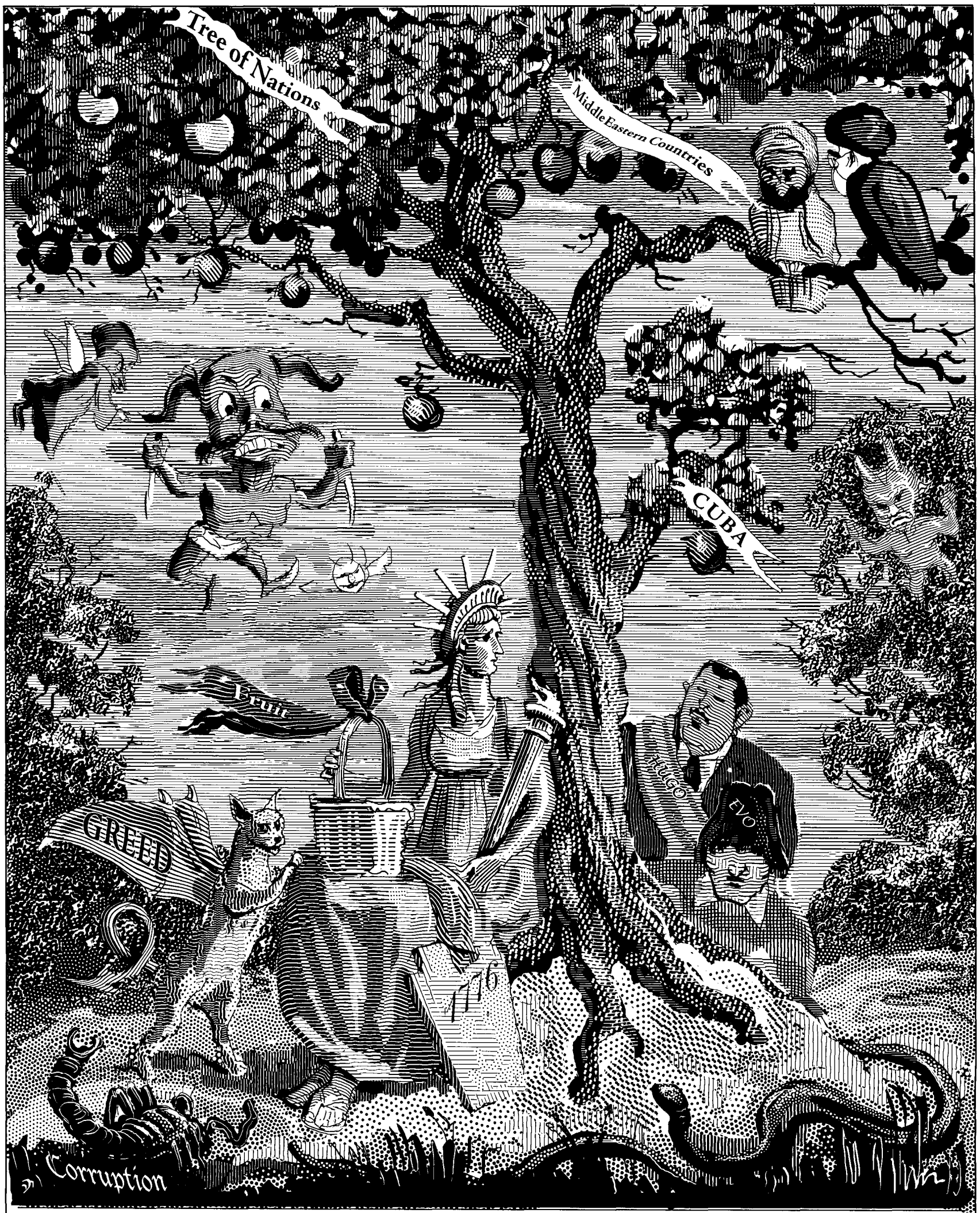


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CLAREMONT REVIEW OF BOOKS
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# OH, WHAT A TANGLED WEBB

Essay by William Voegeli

A POLITICAL PARTY DIVIDED AGAINST itself can stand, actually, for a long, long time. The Democratic Party has been of two minds about populism for more than a century. It likes the populist's righteous anger on behalf of the common man and against the rich and powerful. At the same time, the party is nervously aware that populist anger has rarely stayed confined to this politically acceptable target; it has a dismaying tendency to erupt in religious fundamentalism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism, or racism. Worst of all, populism's targets can include liberal reformers, as when George Wallace stirred up crowds in the North and South with rhetoric about "overeducated, ivory tower folks with pointed heads looking down their noses at us."

As they head into the 2008 elections, the Democrats are preparing to give populism another whirl. In his second presidential campaign John Edwards is reprising the themes he road-tested during his first, when he talked about "two Americas," one that "does the work, the other that gets the reward." In January the Democratic congressional leaders selected Virginia's newly elected senator, Jim Webb, to give the party's response to President Bush's State of the Union address. The speech won rave reviews from the party's journalistic constituency. Articles in the *New Republic*, the *Nation*, and the *American Prospect* immediately touted Webb as a candidate for vice president or even president in 2008, despite the fact that he had never held elective office before 2007. *Newsweek*'s Jonathan Alter praised the "muscular" and "tough-minded liberalism" Webb displayed, saying "it pointed the way to a revival for national Democrats."

The Democrats knew what to expect from Senator Webb's speech, having followed his campaign and devoured his article in the *Wall Street Journal* a few days after his election. "America's top tier has grown infinitely richer and more removed over the past 25 years," he wrote. This "ever-widening divide" between the rich and the rest has engendered a "sense of entitlement...bordering on hubris" among the elite, including "an overt lack of concern for those who are falling behind." Meanwhile, "the average American worker is seeing a different life and a troubling future," marred by "stagnant wages and disappearing jobs."

## Coping with the Situation

WEBB EXPRESSED THE RESENTMENT central to populism, the belief that any economic story with victims must also have villains, ones who can be found in country clubs and boardrooms. This anger at the rich and big corporations reflects the belief that accumulating great wealth is indecent, an activity that pits people against one another, annihilating hopes for a society bound together by cooperation and fraternity. It was voiced by William Jennings Bryan, who told the Democratic convention in 1896 that America needs a leader like Andrew Jackson to stand "against the encroachments of organized wealth." Forty years later, Franklin Roosevelt campaigned for reelection as the nemesis of the "forces of selfishness and of lust for power" that had "created a new despotism."

Populism is, furthermore, deeply skeptical about the claim that capitalism's inequality and competitiveness is redeemed by its productivity. "Trickle-down economics didn't happen," wrote Senator Webb. In the same spirit, President Roosevelt said that freedom and opportunity should not be "a license to climb upwards by pushing other people down."

FDR's choice of words captured the 1930s' zero-sum pessimism. Outside the Roosevelt Administration, populists like Francis Townsend, Huey Long, and Upton Sinclair offered sweeping plans to redistribute wealth, attracting thousands of enthusiasts whose support FDR wanted and whose extremism he feared. Inside the administration, many New Dealers embraced the idea that America would have to learn to make the best of a "mature economy." "We are more or less through the heavy task of equipping the continent with giant capital expenditures," the economist Alvin Hansen wrote in 1939. Another economist who held several important posts in the administration, Lauchlin Currie, wrote that same year, "The economic crisis facing America is not a temporary one. The violence of the depression following 1929 obscured for some time the fact that a profound change of a chronic or secular nature had occurred." FDR himself consistently said that his goal was to raise national income to "ninety or one hundred" billion dollars; the figure in 1929 had been $87 billion.



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The New Dealers were anything but gloomy about discovering that America was stuck on an economic plateau. To avoid the ruinous consequences of cut-throat competition for shares of stagnant markets, a mature economy would require comprehensive government regulation and planning. The New Dealers thought that America's economic prospects were somber, but that they had lots of good ideas for coping with the situation.

The modern populists think that both the economy and inequality will continue to grow, but can't hide the fact that they don't know what to do about it. Democrats have complained about the asymmetry of the modern economic expansion since it began. In 1984 Walter Mondale told the Democratic convention that "the help-wanted ads are full of listings for executives, and for dishwashers—but not much in between." Twenty-two years later, Senator Webb told the country the same thing: the middle class "is losing its place at the table," as both workers and white-collar professionals see their jobs disappearing.

### Beyond the Middle Class

IT'S HARD TO UNDERSTAND HOW THE middle class can spend a quarter-century disappearing without...well, disappearing. In fact, the middle class is shrinking only in the sense that a growing portion of the population is, in economic terms, moving up from it, instead of falling down and out. *Newsweek*'s Robert Samuelson scrutinized the Census Bureau's figures on household income in 2004, concluding, "They certainly don't indicate that, over any reasonable period, middle-class living standards have stagnated. Mostly, the middle class is getting richer." In 2003, according to Samuelson, 15% of U.S. households had pretax incomes over $100,000, and another 29% received between $50,000 and $100,000. In 1990 the comparable figures were 10 and 30% (using constant 2003 dollars). In 1980, they were 6 and 29%.

"When I graduated from college," Senator Webb told his television audience, "the average corporate CEO made 20 times what the average worker did; today, it's nearly 400 times." Webb graduated from Annapolis in 1968, so has obvious personal reasons to choose that year as reference point. (He may also have political reasons to exaggerate the pay gap between today's executives and workers; the *Economist* argues that a better measurement is 120, not 400.) But 1968 was also a significant moment in American economic history, near the end of the long economic boom that began after World War II.

The soaring prosperity of that era was, of course, a massive refutation of the "mature economy" hypothesis. Several ironies are at work here. First, Democrats who had advised Americans to accept the reality of an economy that would never grow again pivoted quickly to claim credit for the boom, priding themselves especially on the adept Keynesian management of aggregate demand. Second, instead of celebrating the higher standard of living afforded to millions of Americans by the strong economy, many Democrats spent the 1950s deriding the Affluent Society's conformity and sterility, before spending the 1960s condemning the middle class's racism and callousness.

Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., conveyed both ironies when he complained, after Dwight Eisenhower defeated Adlai Stevenson in 1952, "Having been enabled by Democratic administrations to live like Republicans, the new suburbanites ended up voting like Republicans." Stevenson himself, according to Michael Barone, was "the first leading Democratic politician to become a critic rather than a celebrator of middle-class American culture," a candidate whose reply to a supporter who enthused that all thinking Americans were for him was, "Yes, but I need to win a majority." By 1965 the *Nation*'s editors were all but pining for a new Depression: "The affluent tend to be mindless, shut off from reality, lost in a surfeit of silly possessions and sillier pursuits."

The final irony is that the postwar expansion, disdained by so many Democrats when it was going on, looms as a golden age in their rhetoric today. It has become the good boom—broadly encompassing, relatively egalitarian, congruent with expanding the New Deal framework. By contrast, the prosperous era that began in August 1982—when the Dow Jones Industrial Average closed below 777, one-sixteenth of its current level—is the bad boom. The "top tier" of speculators and corporate thieves has grown "infinitely richer," while growing numbers of Americans must work three fast-food jobs just to scrape together enough to pay the cable bill.

Instead of buttressing an ideology of managed prosperity, as the good boom did, the bad boom rests on the resurgence of capitalism as both a fact and a belief system. Globalization brings millions of additional producers and consumers into the market, thwarting government efforts to regulate economic activity. Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher commended capitalism as both liberating and productive, which is bad enough; but it is the Soviet Union's demise that manifested most dramatically socialism's collapse. This collapse rendered pragmatic liberalism utterly incoherent: what is the point of clinging to the "vital center," if this means steadfastly splitting the difference between a viable alternative and a hopeless one?

The glowing reminiscence of the good boom is as unreliable as the mature economy theory that assured Americans such an expansion would be impossible. The chief mistake is wishing to recreate the roaring '50s and '60s by turning some dials on the economic policy machine. Senator Webb warned his *Wall Street Journal* readers that "political unrest" is sure to follow once American workers realize "that there are (and were) clear alternatives to the policies that have dislocated careers and altered futures." He does not, however, disclose what those clear alternatives are (and were), an omission supporting Jonathan Alter's claim that the "problem with the populist theme is that Democrats have no real remedies for the effects of globalization on the middle class."

### Good Booms and Bad

CLARITY BEGINS BY ACKNOWLEDGING that the quarter-century of extraordinary prosperity after World War II was the result of that era's extraordinary circumstances. To the long list of economic advantages America had enjoyed throughout its history, the war added a huge new one: the unprecedented devastation inflicted on the other warring nations. Unlike them, mainland America suffered no air attacks, witnessed no battles, and endured no civilian casualties.

America's economic preeminence in the postwar world was the inevitable result. "With 7 percent of the world's population in the late 1940s," wrote James T. Patterson in *Grand Expectations* (1996), a history of the postwar United States, "America possessed 42 percent of the world's income and accounted for half of the world's manufacturing output. American workers produced 57 percent of the planet's steel, 43 percent of electricity, 62 percent of oil, 80 percent of automobiles." These enormous advantages were highly durable. *The American Challenge*, written in 1967 by Jean-Jacques Servan-Schreiber, argued that it was urgent for Europe to emulate America economically, in terms anticipating the books and articles in the 1980s that warned Americans of the need to emulate Japan. *The American Challenge* sold 600,000 copies in France and another 2.5 million copies in the rest of the world.

Postwar America saw the zenith of what Michael Barone has called "Big Unit America." In it, Big Government forged accommodations between Big Business and Big Labor to produce Big Prosperity. Or, as Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., wrote happily in the foreword to *The American Challenge*, America prospered as "a highly organized economic system, based on enormously large units, nourished by an industrial-academic-governmental complex and stimulated, financed and guided by the national government."



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Possessing the biggest industrial machine in the world, America's overriding imperative during the good boom was to keep it running. "Corporate recruiters flocked to the campuses," wrote Patterson, "sometimes making reservations a year ahead to be sure of having a place to interview." Workers without bachelor's degrees prospered, too. The day after leaving high school (not necessarily by graduating), a young man could go to the employment office at the factory where his father or uncle worked, sign up for an assembly line job, and look forward to securing a place in the expanding middle class. This sense that Americans could just climb on the escalator was the most distinctive feature of the good boom. Today, even for workers who are objectively better off than their parents, individual economic standing feels far more tenuous, fueling populist resentments about the bad boom.

In the '50s and '60s, the demand for labor strengthened the union movement; companies preferred concessions to strikes, confident they could make up the cost of increased wages and benefits through increased sales. Today's populists mistake this consequence of the good boom for a cause. As Noam Scheiber wrote in the *New Republic*, "even powerful industrial unions have proved little match for the forces of globalization and technological change. The heavily unionized German manufacturing sector has lost about 25 percent of its jobs since 1991." Hopes that protectionism can bring back the economy of 1968 are equally unrealistic. America's textile industry is "one of the most protected in the country," says Scheiber. "Yet, over the last decade, it has been hardest hit by international competition, shedding about half its jobs."

During the good boom, pervasive competitive pressures were held in abeyance. By the late 1960s, however, Western Europe and Japan had largely recovered from the war and East Asia was becoming a commercial and industrial power. Profit rates for American manufacturers subsequently were cut nearly in half, from 24.6% in the 1960s to 13% in the '80s, according to the economic historian Robert Brenner.

During the bad boom, intense pressures to secure increasingly evanescent competitive advantages have created a global hiring hall. The increased supply of workers bidding to sell generic labor inputs drives down their price. If a bolt can be tightened on an assembly line in Juarez or a customer service phone call answered in Bangalore, Americans are going to find it harder to sell those services at the same price; or to argue that the superior quality of domestic bolt-tightening and call-answering justifies a higher price.

By the same token, competition has bid up the price of labor inputs that make a unique and significant contribution to profitability. If employing even a marginally better chief executive or bond trader can generate millions of dollars of extra profits, the demand for such talents is going to elevate their price. As one would expect in an age of globalization, this new correlation of economic forces is not a uniquely American phenomenon. The *Economist* recently reported that all modern nations "have displayed the same pattern: widening gaps between managers and workers...."

### Do No Harm

None of these considerations impresses Senator Webb. "Incestuous corporate boards regularly approve compensation packages for chief executives and others that are out of logic's range," he wrote—the entirety of his explanation for growing inequality. It's an assertion that not only ignores most of the relevant facts, but is wrong about the one it pinpoints. If incestuous boards were the problem, executive pay ratios should have been considerably higher during the good boom, when the boardroom was a much cozier place, than today when "boards can be in no doubt that the chief executive's pay will...be subjected to minute scrutiny," in the *Economist*'s words.

The first step toward wise policy in an age of highly competitive, market-driven prosperity is to abandon selectively informed nostalgia for the good boom. The second is for politicians and commentators to follow the Hippocratic maxim to do no harm. Policies impeding the market forces that have bequeathed our current prosperity would certainly diminish it. To be sure, there are sensible reforms that can improve the fluidity of labor markets while promoting workers' ability to enhance their skills and protect their health insurance and pensions. But when it comes to policy-making, "populist" has been a reliable synonym for "boneheaded." Andrew Jackson's triumph was the destruction of the Bank of the United States, which destabilized American monetary policy for 80 years until the creation of the Federal Reserve in 1913. William Jennings Bryan's free silver nostrum would have been disastrously inflationary and would have isolated America's economy from the rest of the world. The nation's military vulnerability in the 1930s was exacerbated by the work of the Senate's Special Committee Investigating the Munitions Industry. According to Stanford historian David M. Kennedy, the committee spent two years voicing, but never vindicating, dark suspicions that America had fought against Germany in 1917 for no purpose higher than to make the world "safe for Wall Street bankers and grasping arms manufacturers...the financiers and munitions-makers who harvested obscene profits from the war."

Under the circumstances, then, the fact that Senator Webb and the resurgent Democratic Party populists have no remedies for the problem of globalization is hardly a shortcoming. The real danger to American prosperity will occur when they start devising some.

*William Voegeli is a fellow of the Claremont Institute.*



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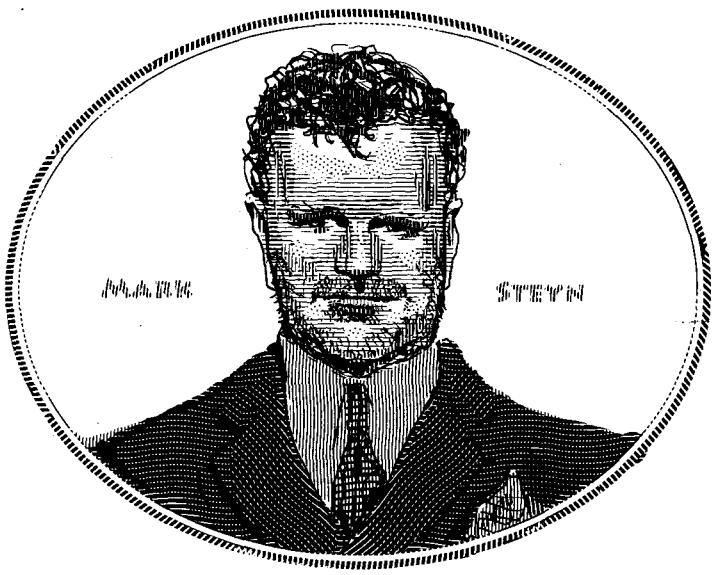
Book Review by Theodore Dalrymple

# The Gelded Age

*America Alone: The End of the World as We Know It*, by Mark Steyn.
Regnery, 256 pages, $27.95



Michael Oakeshott once introduced Isaiah Berlin as the "Paganini of the lecture platform." Mark Steyn is the Paganini of the political column. Unlike Oakeshott, I mean no insult by my compliment. After all, Paganini really was a brilliant virtuoso, and he composed pieces that are still played after a lapse of nearly two centuries—far more than most of us ever achieve.

Paganini appeared all over Europe, but Steyn appears all over the world, from the *Jerusalem Post* to the *Irish Times*. He is a columnist for the *Chicago Sun-Times* and *National Review*, a drama critic for the *New Criterion*, an obituarist for the *Atlantic Monthly*, and a book critic for *Macleans*. He has published three collections of his writing and a book about Broadway. But his fame rests squarely on his witty commentary on politics, and this is his long-awaited treatment of the subject.

Steyn's jokes are often brilliant, not only because they are verbally inventive, but because they make a serious point. (Not all quite hit the mark, but that is because he makes so many.) Quoting the Imam al-Qaradawi, for example, to the effect that "Israelis might have nuclear bombs but we have the children bomb and these bombs must continue until liberation," Steyn comments, "Thank heaven for little girls; they blow up in a most delightful way." This captures perfectly—much better than any mere fulmination could—the depraved moral frivolity of the imam's statement.

Steyn's brilliance as a columnist, however, does not transfer perfectly to book length: *America Alone* is slightly disorganized and jumps from one subject to another, without an underlying structure. The argument of his book shines through, nevertheless, and can be simply put. It is that, because of unprecedented low birth rates of the native populations, and because of the presence of ever larger numbers of Muslim immigrants with very high birth rates, Western Europe is being rapidly Islamized, and many countries will have Muslim majorities in the not very distant future. The low birth rates of its native populations are caused, ultimately, by the welfare state. And the laughably weak pieties of multiculturalism render the native population incapable of resisting Islamization, without being able to engender any loyalty on the part of Muslim immigrants.

The United States alone has a favorable demographic trend (though only by comparison with Europe's, not by comparison with that of the Islamic world). It is also more self-confident ideologically, and therefore in a better position to resist Islamization. Nevertheless, complacency is not in order. There is a danger, and it is growing.

Apocalyptic visions are, of course, much more interesting than more circumspect ones. A prediction that Germany's economy will probably grow by between 1.9 and 2.1% next year is not calculated to sell many newspapers. But apocalypses do occur, and the fact that the fall of the Roman Empire was predicted many times before it actually fell doesn't mean that it didn't fall.

At the beginning of his book, Steyn warns us that many of the predictions made by pundits in the recent past that caused the more susceptible of us to lose sleep, about such alleged problems as the cooling of the planet, the depletion of oil reserves, and overpopulation leading to chronic famine and mass death, now appear ridiculous to us. These predictions turned out to be wrong because those who made them failed to understand that a projection is different from a prediction. For instance, the rate at which a colony of a bacterium initially grows on a Petri dish might lead you to suppose that within a month the entire biosphere will consist of nothing but that kind of bacteria, and within a year the entire universe. Though accurate as a projection, as a prediction that would be ludicrous.

Is Steyn guilty of the same error? Projection may be risky, but at the moment it is all we have to guide us. The alarmist predictions of Islamization depend upon the supposition that the populations of Islamic origin in Western Europe will not change in their allegiance to Islam, and of course this is debatable. So far, at least, the trend seems to be entirely in the wrong direction: the North Africans who were brought in during the 1960s and '70s to man France's booming factories were largely quietist where their religion was concerned, content to practice it in private, while many of their children (or sons, to be precise) favor jihad, despite the fact that they have less strictly religious faith than their fathers and have assimilated to Western culture at least to the extent of hav-



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ing adopted the menacing dumb insolence of American ghetto-dwellers. Steyn is quite right to say that the worst of Islamic culture has been successfully combined with the worst of Western culture, in what is a multiculturalist equivalent of the Black Mass.

STEYN MISSES A POINT OR TWO, BUT THEN his book is not very long. The principal immediate attraction of Islam to young Muslims brought up in the West is actually the control and oppression of women. After all, if you can be sultan of your own home, you need hardly look elsewhere for a sense of achievement or importance; this is hard luck on the women, of course, but it does give a clue as to what *les jeunes* were fighting for during France's riots in autumn 2005. They wanted extra-territoriality, as it were, free from the incursions of the French state, so that in their slums they could continue their one economic activity, drug-dealing, and their domination of women without interruption.

In a very, indeed typically, short-sighted way, the French state missed a golden opportunity to introduce deep division into the areas where *les jeunes* rioted, by forcing insurance companies to pay for all the cars that were burnt there—though contractually they were not obliged to do so. This permitted the owners of the burnt-out cars to indulge in "understanding" and "sympathy" towards destroyers of their own property, whereas if they had been left to bear the losses themselves they might have felt rather less kindly disposed towards the young men so brave in their defense of male dominance.

French and British policy towards their large Muslim populations has been very different. There is apartheid in France: not official or legal, of course, but de facto. Whether it is better or worse to segregate, intentionally or not, your social problems in this way, as the French have done, or to disperse them everywhere so that nowhere is free of them, as the British have done, I leave to moral philosophers to decide.

When I was in France during the riots, the most striking thing was not the riots themselves; it was the complete calm, indeed serenity, of ordinary French citizens. Most of them, of course, had no more contact with the riots than they had had with the rioters beforehand. The commander of the CRS, the extremely tough and rightly feared riot police, issued a statement to the effect that the worse the situation got, the more "serene" were his men: a veiled threat that *les jeunes* were French enough to understand and take seriously, which explains why no cars were burnt, and no riots occurred, in the centers of any major towns or cities.

The British system, of course, has been more laissez-faire in its economic aspects, though combined with enervating political correctness in its cultural ones, which means that in the areas in which Muslims congregate there are large numbers of small businesses, many of them very successful. This is not altogether comforting, however, because it is from this stratum of society—from the sons of the owners of these businesses, who are very far from economically deprived, and who have usually been to university—that some of the suicide bombers have been drawn.

Steyn is right that the main struggle is one of ideas. Unfortunately, political correctness, which is to thought what sentimentality is to compassion, means that the intelligentsia of the West has disarmed itself in advance of any possible struggle. But I think Steyn is mistaken, or at least fails to make a proper distinction, when he says that Islam is ideologically strong and confident. Shrillness and intolerance are not signs of strength, but of weakness; fundamentalism is a response to an awareness that, if the methods of intellectual inquiry that were used to challenge Christianity were permitted in the Muslim world, Islam would soon fall apart. But if Islam fell apart in the Islamic world, what source of self-respect would be left to the population? Their backwardness and mental impoverishment would then be exposed in all nakedness.

The ideological weakness of Islam was exposed in France, when two satirical papers there, *Charlie Hebdo* and *Le Canard enchaîné*, published cartoons after the Danish crisis that were infinitely more disrespectful of Islam and Muslims (and funnier) than the Danish cartoons had ever been. But apart from a failed attempt by a Muslim organization to get them banned by the French courts, they aroused no response: because, of course, the editors had shown that they were not going to be intimidated, and that there was more mockery where the cartoons came from. And there was no possible rejoinder to it. This is precisely why President Bush's response to the Danish cartoon crisis was not only foolish, but contemptible, and actually of far greater importance in the long run than his Iraq policy.

ON THE MATTER OF MILITARY INTERvention, the export of democracy, and Realpolitik, I also disagree with Steyn. He argues that what might be called the our-sonofabitch policy, of propping up leaders who are friendly towards us, or at least not a threat to us, is wrong because it is not sustainable in the long run. Thus, full elections à la the Netherlands are desirable in Egypt (to take an obvious example) because any democratically elected government is preferable to Mubarak. But politics is the art of the possible, and cultures, like individual human beings, are not blank slates upon which (in the words of that late humanitarian, Chairman Mao) the most beautiful characters can be written.

I recall visiting Moldavia and Transnistria at the time of the very nasty and bloody war between them, in which Transnistria claimed its independence from Moldavia. "Why don't you consider," asked a member of a Danish human rights organization, "the Faroe Islands model?" Yes, indeed. For that matter why doesn't *Iraq* consider the Faroe Islands model? I think the fundamental answer is that the Sunni are not Danes, and the Shia are not Faroe Islanders. If I am right, the idea of bringing democracy by military means cannot work unless there is some cultural basis for its introduction, as there clearly was in Germany, and as there was in India by the time the British left, 200 years after they arrived. The British did not impose the Westminster model on India—quite the reverse. The Indians adopted (and adapted) it for themselves, against the opposition of at least many of the British. Likewise with Israel.

It is of course always possible, with sufficient force, to change any country; but no country, howsoever weak it may be, can be changed as if it were putty in the hands of its conquerors. For the sake of humanity, I am glad that this is so: it means that there are inherent limits to power, and it is well to recognize them before, rather than after, embarking on adventures. And it is also worth remembering that one-man-one-vote democracy is perfectly compatible with the greatest crimes known to man.

With Steyn's analysis of the decline of cultural confidence in the West, particularly in Europe, I am in agreement. The welfare state has sapped all will to what is often mocked as *la gloire*; but without a notion of glory, without a notion that there is something in human life more worth striving for than universal central heating and television, no great thing is ever achieved. That is one of the reasons why the public architecture in Europe is now so awful: once you have lost the habits of taste, taste itself disappears even when money is available for its exercise.

This is a very urgent book, but I am unsure whether I want to be around to see whether Steyn's pessimism is entirely justified.

*Theodore Dalrymple is a contributing editor to* City Journal. *He is the author most recently of* Our Culture, What's Left of It: The Mandarins and the Masses *(Ivan R. Dee) and* Romancing Opiates: Pharmacological Lies and the Addiction Bureaucracy *(Encounter Books).*



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Book Review by Patrick J. Garrity

# New World Order

*Dangerous Nation: America's Place in the World from its Earliest Days to the Dawn of the Twentieth Century,* by Robert Kagan. Alfred A. Knopf, 544 pages, $30

In 1943, Walter Lippmann published *U.S. Foreign Policy: Shield of the Republic,* perhaps the most influential popular case for strategic realism in American history. Lippmann warned that the nation's experience of insularity and free security during the 19th century had blinded his countrymen to the realities of power. "Americans have forgotten the compelling and, once seen, the self-evident common principle of all genuine foreign policy," Lippmann wrote. "This is the principle that in foreign relations, as in all other relations, a policy has been formed only when commitments of power have been brought into balance." The United States, Lippmann insisted, must seek security in the solvency of power.

Robert Kagan puts forward a rather different self-evident principle in the first of a two-volume history of American foreign policy, provocatively titled *Dangerous Nation*. For Kagan, senior associate of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and contributing editor to the *Weekly Standard*, U.S. foreign policy is the *sword* of the republic. Even during its formative years America was never a modest, insular nation. That was a comforting myth that began with Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Paine and is promoted today by conservative, realist, and leftist opponents of an assertive American foreign policy. The dominant strain in the national character has always been "messianic" and activist. Kagan's account ends with the Spanish-American War, but it is not hard to see where his second volume will take him. America's desire to make the world safe for democracy was hardly an innovation of Woodrow Wilson, an aberration of the Cold War, or a bizarre pathology of George W. Bush.

By the same token, Kagan notes, suspicion and hatred of America are not copyrighted by aggrieved Muslims or a poetry-writing French foreign minister. Metternich complained about us two centuries ago. America has always been considered dangerous—a threat not only to old Europe and modern tyranny but to all who reject our intrusive form of liberalism, from Native Americans to modern opponents of globalization.

Kagan suggests that the most dangerous foreign policy gap is not between our resources and commitments, but between a falsely modest self-image and historical reality. He denies that the nation has lately become too militaristic, idealistic, arrogant, or imperial—and that only a more modest, considerate America can reclaim hearts and minds abroad. Kagan writes not merely as a historian but as the implicit advocate of an approach to the world—call it what you will: neoconservative, Reaganite, Bush Doctrinaire—that since the Iraqi invasion has come under withering political attack. In his own work and in association with William Kristol and the *Weekly Standard*, Kagan has been an articulate defender of this point of view. But he has never been its uncritical cheerleader. This book is no exception. He writes with great insight, and not a little diffidence, about the American character.

Americans, he reminds us, expanded relentlessly throughout the 18th and 19th centuries. They drove the Indians off millions of acres of land and almost out of existence. The New World empires of France, Spain, and Russia succumbed to this push as well. Expansion was supported not just by ill-tempered nationalists like Andrew Jackson but by such enlightened men as George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and John Quincy Adams. American merchants sailed everywhere in search of commerce. A martial people, our forebears did not shy from using force to support their push for land, markets, and honor.

Kagan argues that American expansionism differed in one critical respect from that of other empires, such as Russia. Our liberal republicanism elevated the rights of the individual over the state and insisted that it was the government's primary job to safeguard those rights. Thus our foreign policy began at the grass roots. It reflected the interests and dreams of ordinary Americans—individual freedom, financial well-being, personal fulfillment, greed—rather than reasons of state or dynastic ambitions. American officials felt obliged to permit and even support territorial and commercial claims made by their citizens, even when these trespassed on foreign lands or waters.

But Americans believe in something greater than the vectors of individual self-interest. For Kagan, the fundamental statement of American foreign policy is not Washington's Farewell Address or the Monroe Doctrine but the Dec-



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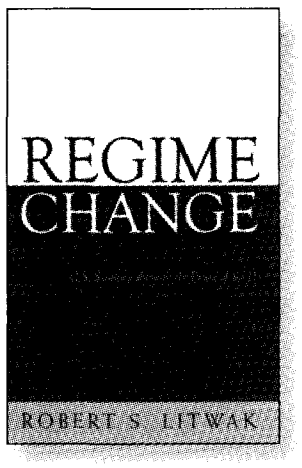


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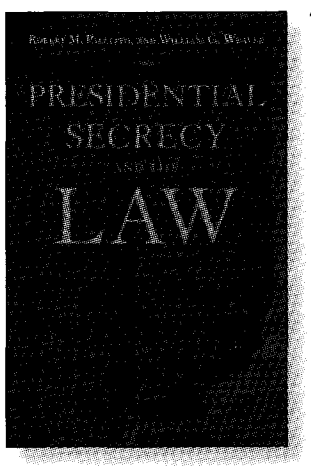


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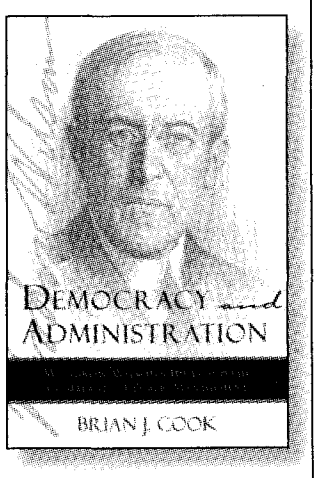


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laration of Independence, with its expression of universal ideals. In his view, the U.S. has always seen itself as acting not merely in its own interest but in the interest of mankind, claiming to bring modern civilization and the "blessings of liberty" to the nations we touch. Kagan quotes Lincoln's Secretary of State, William Seward: "The rights asserted by our forefathers were not peculiar to themselves, they were the common rights of mankind." Therefore, the United States had a duty "to renovate the condition of mankind" and lead the way to "the universal restoration of power to the governed" everywhere in the world.

THE DECLARATION SET THE STANDARDS of political legitimacy—the consent of the governed, and securing the rights of the governed—against which all other regimes were measured. Americans admitted that governments ought not to be changed for light and transient causes and that other peoples, in other cultures, might accept different forms of rule. Nevertheless, Americans tended to view non-democratic governments as transitory. Foreign regime change was not only possible but desirable. Indeed, American leaders thought change was inevitable once the liberal truths of the Declaration spread: the American Founders and their successors were in this sense progressives. Even a realist icon like John Quincy Adams, who famously explained that America "goes not abroad, in search of monsters to destroy," believed in the primacy of ideology in international affairs and in America's historic role in improving the condition of mankind.

Kagan explores in great detail the implications for foreign policy of that tragic deviation from the universal rights of the Declaration, the racial despotism of the slaveholding South. Slavery complicated and corrupted America's mission. For nearly four decades American expansionism followed a stop-start pattern as the nation tried unsuccessfully to reconcile two antagonistic approaches to the world. The South sought and the North (by and large) resisted slavery's expansion. The peculiar institution's violent abolition was therefore a defining moment in the country's foreign policy. It unleashed American power and removed the ambivalence and sense of hypocrisy caused by the union with slaveholders. Northern opposition to slavery was America's first great moral crusade and war of ideological conquest.

The Spanish-American War was the next great endeavor. The U.S., to be sure, had self-interested reasons for going to war, including commercial interests in Cuba and the desire to ensure American preeminence in the Caribbean basin. The decision for war, however, was motivated primarily by public outrage over the Spanish government's brutal policies in Cuba, which had caused an estimated 300,000 deaths, one-fifth of the island's population. Yellow journalism might have stirred the pot but the truth was bad enough. Senator Henry Cabot Lodge, supposedly a cold-blooded realist, argued that the United States had a responsibility to defend the Cuban people against Spanish oppression. When Ambassador John Hay, another realist, famously called it a "splendid little war," he was not trying to be ironic; he had in mind the war's lofty purposes and accomplishments.

KAGAN REJECTS THE STANDARD DIVISIONS of the American foreign policy tradition into realists and idealists. He treats Hamilton and Jefferson as merely representing two different forms of liberalism. In his view, the dominant, default position of American foreign policy has always been "vindicationist": i.e., America thinks it has the right and duty to bring liberty to the world. Kagan acknowledges an enduring tradition of "realist" criticism, warning Americans against arrogance, hubris, blind idealism, and imperialism. For example, Patrick Henry accused supporters of the Constitution of conspiring to turn the young republic into a "great and mighty empire." Southern conservatives before and after the Civil War opposed foreign policy moralism, fearing it would be turned against domestic slavery or racial segregation. Mark Twain and the anti-imperialist movement opposed the acquisition of the Philippines. But in Kagan's America, such warnings are a distinctly minor theme: Anti-federalists, Old Republicans, Southern racists, Mugwumps, and other critics of an expansive foreign policy sometimes delayed or diverted history, but they rarely managed to steer the United States on a fundamentally different course. Universalistic liberal republicanism is too deeply rooted in the American DNA.

Kagan offers a striking, distinctive, and powerful account of the early history of American foreign policy. Placing the Declaration of Independence at the center of the story rings true. *Dangerous Nation*, when read together with Kagan's prior studies of Central America and U.S.–European relations, makes the persuasive point that American military, economic, and ideological power has grown to the point where it is almost impossible for us not to intervene in the affairs of others. U.S. withdrawal or neglect of an international crisis is tantamount to choosing sides, and almost guarantees that we will revisit the crisis under even less auspicious conditions. Kagan's story is a very good read as history, a stimulating and fresh look at events familiar and not so familiar.



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Yet any monocausal explanation, however nuanced, has its limitations. Kagan looks for a key under a lamppost because that is where the light shines. His narrative bends to accommodate his thesis. He tends to conflate, for instance, the foreign policy views of Washington and Hamilton, as well as Lincoln and Seward, where the evidence suggests that there were important distinctions between the presidents and their advisors. He recounts many long-forgotten interventions—such as the dispute in the 1880s with Germany and Britain over Samoa—but dismisses long periods of American inactivity and self-denial as temporary aberrations caused by circumstances. These periods may have grown briefer as American power increased, but they are an essential part of the story, nonetheless. The United States has often paused, reflected, and accepted limits on its ability to influence events or promote liberty abroad. Individual citizens and congressmen may have wanted to intervene in favor of Greek, Hungarian, Polish, or Spanish-American liberation movements—but the U.S. government steadfastly resisted even non-binding official expressions of ideological support. The debate over slavery explains some but not all of that story. To understand American foreign policy in its fullest sense, there is still considerable value in multi-tradition accounts, such as those offered by Walter McDougall (*Promised Land, Crusader State*, 1997) and Walter Russell Mead (*Special Providence: American Foreign Policy and How it Changed the World*, 2001).

In picking a fight with critics of an ideologically assertive liberal American foreign policy, Kagan chooses the ground most favorable to his case. Most realists, for instance, are not nostalgic about the lost age of a more modest America. They agree that American foreign policy, at least after the founding period, has been driven, alas, by abstract moral imperatives. Henry Kissinger, for example, following Lippmann and Hans Morgenthau, argues that America has swung wildly between the extremes of isolationism and international crusades, both of which have roots in liberal utopianism. Realism claims to offer a moderate ground between these poles, to provide policy ballast that recognizes the limits of power, the realities of international politics, and foreign cultures' resistance to change. During the 1930s, 1940s, and 1970s, when the Eurasian balance of power was under threat, realists urged the United States to become more active in global affairs. Today, with America apparently at one of its interventionist extremes and widely viewed as the principal threat to international security, realism urges a more modest agenda in our own interest, and in the interest of human liberty.

The challenge for those like Kagan who favor an assertive liberal foreign policy is to demonstrate that liberal principles themselves—not the realists' dependence on external limiting forces, or a sense of historical tragedy—offer a superior practical and moral guide to statecraft. Kagan seems reluctant to engage in a critical discussion of first principles. When he summarized his "dangerous nation" argument in the *New Republic*, he acknowledged that "whether a different kind of international system or a different kind of America would be preferable is a debate worth having. But let us have this debate about our future without illusions about our past." But he begs off the decisive debate—or declares it irrelevant. America is what it is and what it always has been. Get over it. "Today many hope and believe that the difficulties in Iraq will turn Americans once and for all against ambition and messianism in the world," Kagan wrote recently in the *Washington Post*. "History is not on their side."

But why should those who favor a more modest foreign policy—or a different America—concede the point that history is against them? Kagan's own narrative is hardly triumphalist or uncritical. Native Americans were treated brutally. Reconstruction, like many other American experiences with democratic nation-building, proved deeply disappointing. The Spanish-American war led to a most unsplendid conflict against the Filipinos, and a frustrating occupation of Cuba that left lingering resentments. Kagan acknowledges a parallel between the Alien and Sedition Acts and the illiberal anti-Communist excesses of the 1940s and 1950s. His young America often appears immoderate and not particularly appealing; in fact, much of his text could have been written by a realist or radical critic of the American regime. Although his honesty does him credit, it hardly dispels the arguments of those today, at home and abroad, who fear a dominant, or domineering, America.

To answer these arguments may require a closer examination of the American foreign policy tradition to isolate the statesmen and principles of action that best represent what Kagan calls the founders' practical idealism. Not all aspects of modern liberalism—and Kagan's presentation of liberalism is decidedly modern—are created equal or are equally capable of guiding our relations with the rest of the world. The Declaration, Washington's Farewell Address, John Quincy Adams's July 4, 1821 address, the Monroe Doctrine, Lincoln's Kossuth Resolutions, and other important statements of American foreign policy are meditations on moderation as well as on our responsibility to the rest of mankind. In these and like instances, universal principles did not supersede the facts of geography and power, the need for circumstantial judgments of costs, risks, and opportunities, or the value of according a decent respect to the opinions of mankind. Early American progressivism is not necessarily the same as 20th-century progressivism, in which liberalism becomes something of a categorical imperative.

Kagan has the insight to come to grips with these fundamental questions. His second volume offers him the opportunity to do so.

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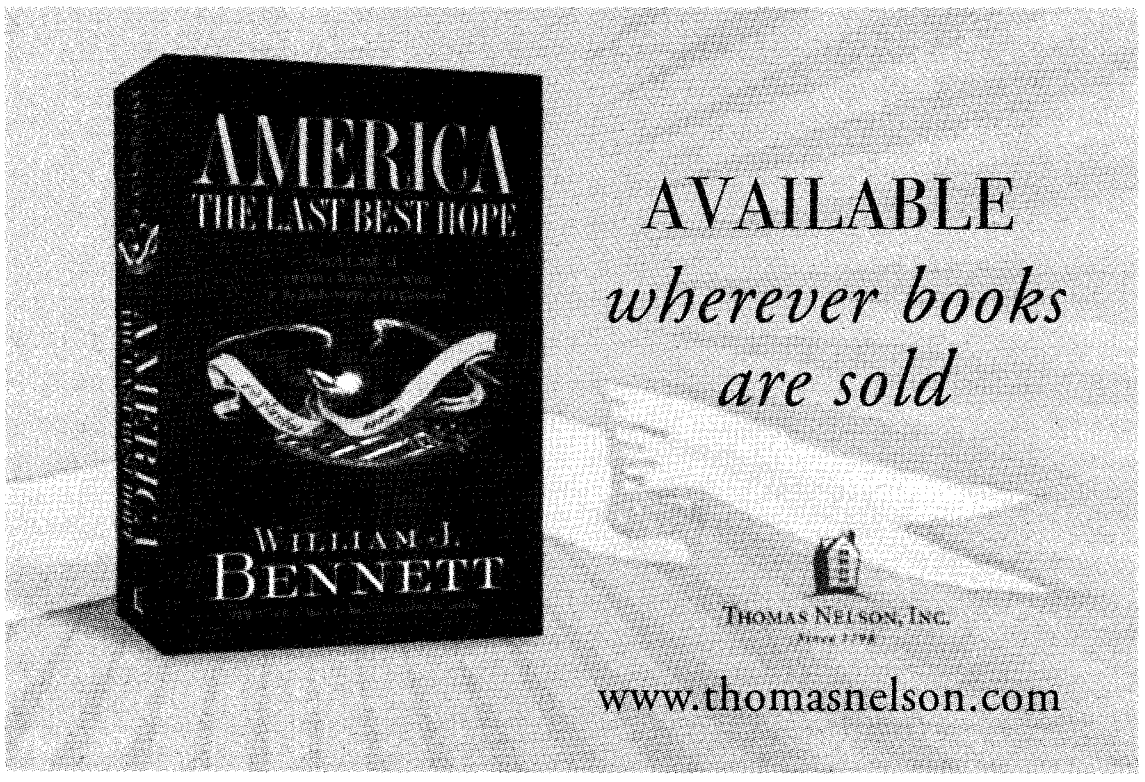




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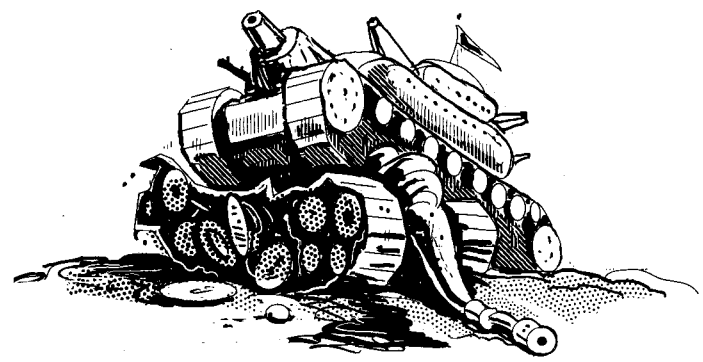
Book Review by Colin Dueck

# Arms and the Man

*War Made New: Technology, Warfare, and the Course of History: 1500 to Today,*
by Max Boot. Gotham Books, 640 pages, $35

*Finding the Target: The Transformation of American Military Policy,*
by Frederick W. Kagan. Encounter Books, 432 pages, $29.95



It is commonly argued that the practice of warfare has been dramatically transformed by a "revolution in military affairs," a revolution triggered by changes in precision weaponry and information technology. Such revolutions—"RMAs," the experts call them—have occurred in the past and have sometimes altered the international balance of power. The Bush Administration, for its part, has made military modernization and transformation a high priority in its defense policy. It is therefore of considerable practical interest whether the frequent claims of revolutionary changes in warfare stand up to close scrutiny and, specifically, whether the ongoing RMA will really give the United States a significant advantage against its current and potential enemies.

Max Boot and Frederick Kagan, two of America's leading defense analysts, tackle these questions in new books that share certain points in common—especially the rejection of deterministic interpretations of military innovation—though the central arguments of each volume are quite different.

In *War Made New*, Max Boot tells a fascinating story of the causes and consequences of four historic revolutions in military affairs: the "gunpowder revolution" (1588-1803), the "industrial revolution" (1866-1905), the "second industrial revolution" (1940-1945), and the "information revolution" (1991-2005). Boot is well aware that the designation of these four is controversial, but he shows that military innovations tend to cluster together at certain times and places and can be usefully studied in periods of ferment.

During the gunpowder revolution, several Western European armies began to employ muskets more effectively by developing new doctrines of drill and discipline. The creation of expensive, professional, standing armies encouraged the rise of centralized state bureaucracies. Contemporaneous advances in navigation, sailing rigs, heavy artillery, and naval tactics also combined to create a military revolution at sea. These technological and organizational transformations on land and water gave a significant, if temporary, edge to those countries that had pioneered them. They also gave military advantages to European armies and navies against non-Western forces, allowing the British, for example, to conquer India.

The RMA of the mid-19th century was possible because of technological developments like modern railways, the telegraph, and improvements in rifle design. Compared with muskets, rifles offered greater accuracy, greater range, and greater speed in reloading for the average infantryman. The telegraph allowed commanders to communicate over long distances as never before; and railroads, properly used, made possible the rapid concentration and movement of armies. It was the Prussians, and specifically Prussian General Helmuth von Moltke, who took advantage of these technological changes most effectively. By utilizing General Staff to coordinate, plan, and direct the combined motions of large, well-trained conscript armies, the Prussians won striking military victories over both Austria in 1866 and France in 1870. These victories laid the groundwork for the unification of Germany and changed the European balance of power.

The RMA of the early 20th century involved the development and effective use of new weapons such as tanks, planes, and aircraft carriers. Various nations acted as pioneers in each domain. During the 1930s, the United States, Britain, the Soviet Union, and Japan developed new doctrines in relation to amphibious landings, air defense, armored warfare, and naval aviation, respectively. But it was the Germans who initially put the new military technologies to their most spectacular use in the 1940 invasion of France. Despite having no great advantage in numbers or even weapons, the German army overwhelmed the French in a stunning display of so-called "blitzkrieg" or lightning warfare. It would take the Allies massive efforts and several years to roll back and defeat the German military machine.

The current RMA is based upon the use of precision-guided munitions, together with advanced technology in communications, targeting, and surveillance. While the possibility of such a revolution was first recognized by Soviet authors in the 1960s and 1970s, it was America that pioneered it. The Air Force began using "smart bombs," to considerable effect, in the latter stages of the Vietnam War. The first Gulf War saw the increased use of stealth technology and precision weaponry in a display of high-tech military power that set many other armies scrambling to adapt. The overthrow of the Taliban in fall



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2001 was accomplished through the creative use of U.S. Special Forces on the ground, guiding and directing air strikes (with the help of unmanned aerial vehicles) in support of Afghanistan's Northern Alliance. And of course the initial, conventional phase of the current war in Iraq—the overthrow of Saddam Hussein in 2003—was accomplished with remarkable speed, in part due to the effective use of new American technologies.

*War Made New* tells the story of military innovations in part through the depiction of colorful personalities and battlefield conditions, but Boot's lively, accessible style does not hide the fact that he has digested an enormous amount of historical, analytical, and contemporary material on the subject of RMAs; and his book offers serious lessons for current policy. The first, most important lesson is that new technology does not lead to either military transformation or military advantage by itself. Skillful, realistic, and creative new tactics, doctrines, training, leadership, and organization are absolutely necessary to allow military innovation to occur. The second lesson is that whenever nations lead in military innovation, they gain broad geopolitical benefits, although others are usually quick in trying to close the gap. Finally, military transformation is often partial and gradual rather than sharply discontinuous. New weapons and tactics necessarily co-exist with old ones, and overly active imaginations pressing for revolutionary transformation can be just as much of a threat to military effectiveness as plodding or stagnant doctrines. All of these conclusions are well supported in the existing scholarly literature on military innovation, and Boot communicates them clearly and engagingly to the general reader.

Boot believes that the current RMA is real, conferring great advantages on the United States against its opponents; but he recognizes that it also has its limits. War continues to be a difficult, messy, and bloody business. Unconventional wars like the one in Iraq are particularly ill-suited to a primary emphasis on technology. Boot therefore takes something of a middle position on the question of the current revolution, arguing that it is neither irrelevant nor a cure-all. He advocates developing and maintaining military strength across the board, in high-tech weapons systems as well as counterinsurgent and postwar reconstruction capabilities, to be able to face whatever challenges come down the road.

FREDERICK KAGAN WOULD CERTAINLY agree with Boot's emphasis on training, tactics, and doctrine, and his eschewal of a purely technological approach. But he goes much further than Boot in attempting to address difficult trade-offs in defense planning and to deflate enthusiasm for the current RMA. Indeed, *Finding the Target* amounts to a devastating critique of the recent penchant for U.S. military transformation.

Kagan begins by detailing the ways in which the U.S. armed forces responded to the challenges of the 1970s—Vietnam, demoralization, declining defense budgets—while facing continually growing Soviet military capabilities. Unable to rely on quantitative or budgetary expansion relative to Soviet armed forces, we were forced to look for qualitative advantages. The shift to an all-volunteer force allowed for a significant improvement in the motivation and professionalism of U.S. troops. Pilots experimented with ways to improve their ability to outmaneuver the enemy. The armed services began to utilize more realistic and demanding training programs. By the 1980s, through the doctrine of AirLand Battle, the Army together with the Air Force developed aggressive, creative plans for countering a potential Soviet invasion of Western Europe. A fresh emphasis on joint operations was both epitomized and encouraged by the Goldwater-Nichols Act of 1986, which streamlined the Joint Chiefs of Staff, created a system of regional field commanders, and gave each commander authority over all U.S. forces within his region. The result of these various reforms, together with new weapons systems and (by the 1980s) restored levels of defense spending, was a much improved, highly professional, motivated force with a fresh commitment to speed, mobility, tactical skill, and combined arms warfare.

Kagan has great respect for the improvements in the U.S. armed forces during the 1970s and 1980s. His point is that changes in technology were only part of this process and that any transformations that occurred were the result of clear thinking about concrete and immediate challenges rather than abstract speculation regarding vast technological changes and unknown opponents. In effect, he distinguishes these early reforms, which really created the high quality of today's U.S. armed forces, from the more recent and exclusive emphasis on the supposedly revolutionary impact of new information technologies and precision munitions.

During the late 1980s and early 1990s, the argument began to gain steam that precision air strikes could be used to attack a country's leadership, infrastructure, troops, communications, and equipment to paralyze and overwhelm it without the need for heavy, costly ground campaigns. In some circles, the first Gulf War was viewed as a vindication of this argument. The air campaign against Saddam in 1991 certainly achieved remarkable effects. It removed Iraq's air force from the equation; undermined and damaged Iraqi command and control, communications, and logistics; demoralized Iraq's rank and file soldiers; and dramatically reduced the Iraqi army's maneuverability. As Kagan explains, however, it was not airpower by itself that won the Gulf War: a major ground campaign, executed with skill and preparation by the U.S. Army and Marine Corps, was critical in forcing Saddam Hussein's army out of Kuwait. There is no reason to believe that this outcome could have been reached through airpower alone. Yet the images of precision weapons destroying Iraqi targets from great distances encouraged the impression that a new age had dawned in warfare, an age of smart bombs and real-time intelligence, in which the U.S. would be able to fight its conflicts at minimal cost or commitment on the ground, by relying on high-flying technological advantages.

SUCH IMPRESSIONS WERE PARTICULARLY well-suited to the bureaucratic interests and predilections of the U.S. Air Force, fighting as it was for a share of the pie in the uncertain world of post-Cold War defense planning. Even the Army, eager to prove its continued relevance after the collapse of the USSR, embraced the idea that it would have to become a much lighter, more mobile force, capable of targeting the enemy from great distances. As Kagan wryly notes, this very effort at adaptation undermined the traditional case for having an army at all, since it essentially accepted the premise that close combat on the ground was outmoded.

The misimpressions arising from the first Gulf War grew over the course of the 1990s. America's pin-prick wars against Slobodan Milosevic during that decade were not really fought in the absence of ground support. The United States relied upon Muslim and Croat proxies in 1995, and upon the Kosovo Liberation Army in 1999—together with the ultimate threat of some kind of U.S. ground intervention—to achieve significant effects against Serb forces. It is still not entirely clear why Milosevic conceded when he did in 1999; Russian diplomatic pressure seems to have played an important part. In any case, the widespread perception that the war over Kosovo was won entirely from the air—perhaps the first such victory in history—only strengthened the hand of airpower enthusiasts and advocates of transformation. War could now be seen as a kind of targeting drill, in which the United States would launch precision strikes from great distances against critical nodes in the enemy's command, logistical, and communications system, while minimizing risk to American forces. Here was the military equivalent of Dell Computers, delivering light, efficient, "just-in-time warfare" to mimic the wonders of information-age business models. It was a vision that had much appeal



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during the Clinton years for reasons financial, political, and bureaucratic. The practical international and military disadvantages of this vision—its inability to accomplish the political mission at hand or to deliver effective control over events unfolding on the ground—were not given equal consideration. Apparently nobody in high office asked the question: what if, after being pummeled by our high-tech precision weaponry, the enemy does not surrender?

FAR FROM DISOWNING THE CONCEPT OF light, agile, long-distance warfare, George W. Bush campaigned in 2000 in favor of the military's accelerated transformation. He also campaigned against "nation-building" missions overseas. The appointment of Donald Rumsfeld as secretary of defense indicated his seriousness in both regards. Rumsfeld made military transformation his leading priority, downplayed the importance of operations other than war, and pressed his vision with keen bureaucratic skill and energy. After the terrorist attacks of September 2001, he saw no reason to question this emphasis on transformation. On the contrary, he saw the war against the Taliban, and then the invasion of Iraq, as opportunities to fight and win America's wars using transformational weapons and techniques, without the burden of heavy or protracted postwar stability operations. In practical terms, this meant conducting both wars with a relatively small number of troops on the ground, and with every intention of having those troops leave as quickly as they had arrived.

The war in Iraq has now lasted almost four years, degenerating first into a bloody counterinsurgency and then into multidirectional sectarian violence of increasing brutality. The war in Afghanistan, though less visible in the daily headlines, has also seen disappointments, as Taliban forces fight to recover their former influence. We are now entitled to ask whether or not the emphasis on military transformation—Rumsfeld's preferred method, and apparently President Bush's as well, for fighting these wars—has been vindicated by events.

Kagan's achievement in *Finding the Target* is to show that America's "postwar" frustrations were not simply unpredictable complications of war, but were massively, and unnecessarily, aggravated by the administration's emphasis on military transformation. In both Afghanistan and Iraq, the administration failed to match military means to political ends. The obvious and stated purpose of American intervention was not only to overthrow hostile regimes, but also to create a stable postwar environment in which support for terrorism could not flourish. The latter goal was at least as important as the former; without it, neither invasion would have made sense. Yet despite lip service to the contrary, the planning for both wars was conducted with an astonishing indifference to the entirely foreseeable need to create a secure political environment after conventional military operations had ceased.

In Afghanistan, this failure allowed for significant numbers of al-Qaeda terrorists, including bin Laden, to escape to the Pakistani border at the end of 2001, and for warlords to threaten the fragile new central government. In Iraq, it permitted a period of chaos which in turn encouraged the rise of a dangerous insurgency. To say that hindsight is 20/20 is simply not good enough: both contingencies were foreseen and warned of at the time by numerous defense, intelligence, and foreign policy experts and officials within the U.S. Yet the administration apparently chose to ignore them because of its commitment to a particular form of light, detached, high-tech warfare.

WHAT IS TO BE DONE? THE U.S. military has learned (or more properly, re-learned) hard lessons about the nature of counterinsurgency and stability operations since 2003 and has begun to move in the right direction. Kagan believes our military forces are over-extended and recommends immediately increasing the size of both the Army and Marine Corps. He also suggests creating some sort of institutional locus for the interagency planning of postwar stability operations (for example, by empowering regional U.S. military commanders to formulate such plans with the help of liaison staff from the State Department and CIA). A bias against "nation-building" is perfectly understandable in itself. But if the U.S. is going to intervene abroad to establish friendly new governments, it has no choice but to prepare itself for some form of nation-building. Troops must be properly trained not only to fight and win high-tech conventional wars against conventional opponents, but to prevail in postwar conditions against guerrilla tactics and terrorist insurgencies. A primary emphasis on technological transformation is positively unhelpful under such circumstances, because it creates the illusion that these relatively low-tech, messy, close-in, unconventional conflicts are simply temporary distractions from the larger and more important project of modernization. They are not. On the contrary, they are the only kind of wars the U.S. is actively fighting, and there is no more urgent priority than winning them.

*Colin Dueck is assistant professor in the Department of Public and International Affairs at George Mason University, and the author of* Reluctant Crusaders: Power, Culture, and Change in American Grand Strategy *(Princeton University Press).*



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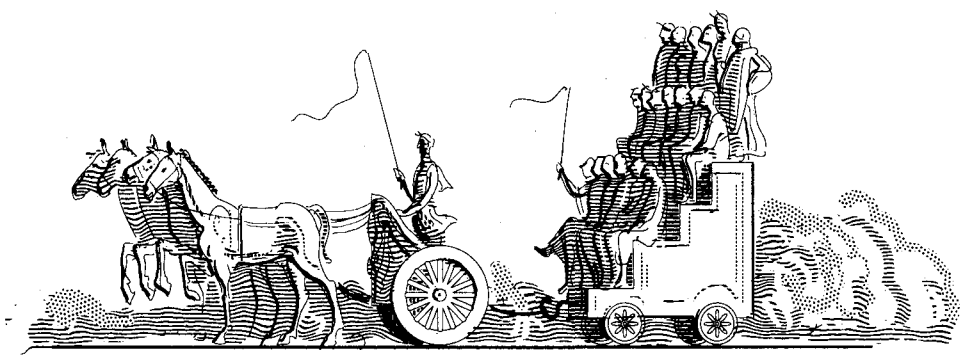
Essay by Harvey C. Mansfield

# The Case for the Strong Executive



Complaints against the "imperial presidency" are back in vogue. With a view to President Bush, Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., has expanded and reissued the book of the same name he wrote against Richard Nixon, and Bush critics have taken up the phrase in a chorus. In response John Yoo and Richard Posner (and others) have defended the war powers of the president.

This is not the first time that a strong executive has been attacked and defended, and it will not be the last. Our Constitution, as long as it continues, will suffer this debate—I would say, give rise to it, preside over, and encourage it. Though I want to defend the strong executive, I mainly intend to step back from that defense to show why the debate between the strong executive and its adversary, the rule of law, is necessary, good, and—under the Constitution—never-ending. In other circumstances I could see myself defending the rule of law. Americans are fortunate to have a Constitution that accommodates different circumstances. Its flexibility keeps it in its original form and spirit a "living constitution," ready for change, and open to new necessities and opportunities. The "living constitution" conceived by the Progressives actually makes it a prisoner of ongoing events and perceived trends. To explain the constitutional debate between the strong executive and the rule of law I will concentrate on its sources in political philosophy and, for greater clarity, ignore the constitutional law emerging from it.

## Saving Republicanism

The case for a strong executive should begin from a study, on this occasion a quick survey, of the American republic. The American republic was the first to have a strong executive that was intended to be republican as well as strong, and the success, or long life, of America's Constitution qualifies it as a possible model for other countries. Modern political science beginning from Machiavelli abandoned the best regime featured by classical political science because the best regime was utopian or imaginary. Modern political scientists wanted a practical solution, and by the time of Locke, followed by Montesquieu, they learned to substitute a model regime for the best regime; and this was the government of England. The model regime would not be applicable everywhere, no doubt, because it was not intended to be a lowest common denominator. But it would show what could be done in the best circumstances.

The American Founders had the ambition to make America the model regime, taking over from England. This is why they showed surprising respect for English government, the regime they had just rebelled against. America would not only make a republic for itself, but teach the world how to make a successful republic and thus improve republicanism and save the reputation of republics. For previous republics had suffered disastrous failure, alternating between anarchy and tyranny, seeming to force the conclusion that orderly government could come only from monarchy, the enemy of republics. Previous republics had put their faith in the rule of law as the best way to foil one-man rule. The rule of law would keep power in the hands of many, or at least a few, which was safer than in the hands of one. As the way to ensure the rule of law, Locke and Montesquieu fixed on the separation of powers. They were too realistic to put their faith in any sort of higher law; the rule of law would be maintained by a legislative process of institutions that both cooperated and competed.

Now the rule of law has two defects, each of which suggests the need for one-man rule. The first is that law is always imperfect by being universal, thus an average solution even in the best case, that is inferior to the living intelligence of a wise man on the spot, who can judge particular circumstances. This defect is discussed by Aristotle in the well-known passage in his *Politics* where he considers "whether it is more advantageous to be ruled by the best man or the best laws." The other defect is that the law does not know how to make itself obeyed. Law assumes obedience, and as such seems oblivious to resistance to the law by the "governed," as if it were enough to require criminals to turn themselves in. No, the law must be "enforced," as we say. There must be police, and the rulers over the police must use energy (Alexander Hamilton's term) in addition to reason. It is a delusion to believe that governments can have energy without ever resorting to the use of force. The best source of energy turns out to be the same as the best source of reason—one man. One man, or to use Machiavelli's expression, *uno solo*, will be the greatest source of energy if he regards it as necessary to maintaining his own rule. Such a person will have the greatest incentive to be watchful, and to be both cruel and merciful in correct contrast and proportion. We are talking about Machiavelli's prince, the man whom in apparently unguarded moments he called a tyrant.

The American Founders heeded both criticisms of the rule of law when they created the presidency. The president would be the source of energy in government, that is, in the administration of government, energy being a neutral term that might include Aristotle's discretionary virtue and Machiavelli's tyranny—in which only partisans could discern the difference. The founders of course accepted the principle of the



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rule of law, as being required by the republican genius of the American people. Under this principle, the wise man or prince becomes and is called an "executive," one who carries out the will and instruction of others, of the legislature that makes the law, of the people who instruct or inspire the legislature. In this weak sense, the dictionary definition of "executive," the executive forbears to rule in his own name as one man. This means that neither one-man wisdom nor tyranny is admitted into the Constitution as such; if there is need for either, the need is subordinated to, or if you will, covered over by, the republican principle of the rule of law.

### John Locke's Prerogative

Yet the executive subordinated to the rule of law is in danger of being subordinate to the legislature. This was the fault in previous republics. When the separation of powers was invented in 17th-century England, the purpose was to keep the executive subordinate; but the trouble was the weakness of a subordinate executive. He could not do his job, or he could do his job only by overthrowing or cowing the legislature, as Oliver Cromwell had done. John Locke took the task in hand, and made a strong executive in a manner that was adopted by the American Founders.

Locke was a careful writer, so careful that he did not care if he appeared to be a confused writer. In his *Second Treatise of Government* he announces the supremacy of the legislature, which was the slogan of the parliamentary side in the English Civil War, as the principle that should govern a well-made constitution. But as the argument proceeds, Locke gradually "fortifies" (to use James Madison's term) the executive. Locke adds other related powers to the subordinate power of executing the laws: the federative power dealing with foreign affairs, which he presents as conceptually distinct from the power of executing laws but naturally allied; the veto, a legislative function; the power to convoke the legislature and to correct its representation should it become corrupt; and above all, the prerogative, defined as "the power of doing public good without a rule." Without a rule! Even more: "sometimes too against the direct letter of the law." This is the very opposite of law and the rule of law—and "prerogative" was the slogan of the king's party in the same war.

Thus Locke combined the extraconstitutional with the constitutional in a contradiction; besides saying that the legislature is "the supreme power" of the commonwealth, he speaks of "the supreme executive power." Locke, one could say, was acting as a good citizen, bringing peace to his country by giving both sides in the Civil War a place in the constitution. In doing so he ensured that the war would continue, but it would be peaceful because he also ensured that, there being reason and force on both sides, neither side could win conclusively. The American Constitution adopted this fine idea and improved it. The American Founders helped to settle Locke's deliberate confusion of supremacy by writing it into a document and ratifying it by the people rather than merely scattering it in the treatise of a philosopher. By being formalized the Constitution could become a law itself, but a law above ordinary law and thus a law above the rule of law in the ordinary sense of laws passed by the legislature. Thus some notion of prerogative—though the word "prerogative" was much too royal for American sensibilities—could be pronounced legal inasmuch as it was constitutional. This strong sense of executive power would be opposed, within the Constitution, to the rule of law in the usual, old-republican meaning, as represented by the two rule-of-law powers in the Constitution, the Congress which makes law and the judiciary which judges by the law.

The American Constitution signifies that it has fortified the executive by vesting the president with "the executive power," complete and

"In my opinion it is a grand book. . . . Morally and philosophically I find myself in agreement with virtually the whole of it: and not only in agreement with it, but in deeply moved agreement." —John Maynard Keynes

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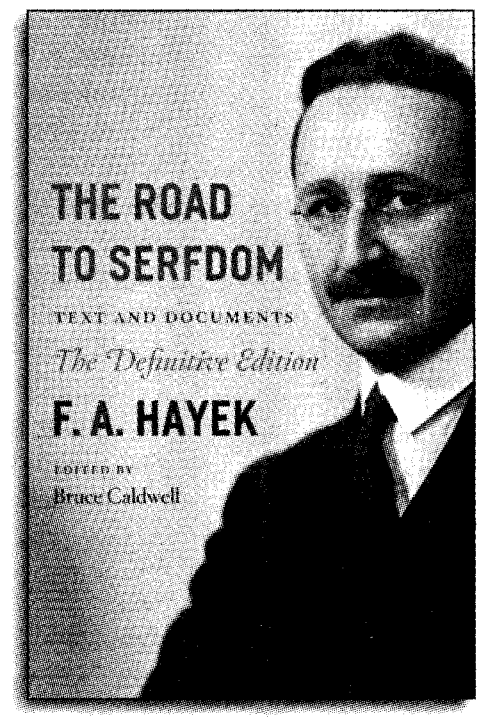


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undiluted in Article II, as opposed to the Congress in Article I, which receives only certain delegated and enumerated legislative powers. The president takes an oath "to execute the Office of President" of which only one function is to "take care that the laws be faithfully executed." In addition, he is commander-in-chief of the military, makes treaties (with the Senate), and receives ambassadors. He has the power of pardon, a power with more than a whiff of prerogative for the sake of a public good that cannot be achieved, indeed that is endangered, by executing the laws. In *The Federalist*, as already noted, the executive represents the need for energy in government, energy to complement the need for stability, satisfied mainly in the Senate and the judiciary.

### The Test of Good Government

ENERGY AND STABILITY ARE NECESSARY in every form of government, but in their previous, sorry history, republics had failed to meet these necessities. Republican government cannot survive, as we would say, by ideology alone. The republican genius is dominant in America, where there has never been much support for anything like an *ancien régime*, but support for republicanism is not enough to make a viable republic. The republican spirit can actually cause trouble for republics if it makes people think that to be republican it is enough merely to oppose monarchy. Such an attitude tempts a republican people to republicanize everything so as to make government resemble a monarchy as little as possible. Although *The Federalist* made a point of distinguishing a republic from a democracy (by which it meant a so-called pure, non-representative democracy), the urge today to democratize everything has similar bad effects. To counter this reactionary republican (or democratic, in today's language) belief characteristic of short-sighted partisans, *The Federalist* made a point of holding the new, the novel, American republic to the test of good government as opposed merely to that of republican government.

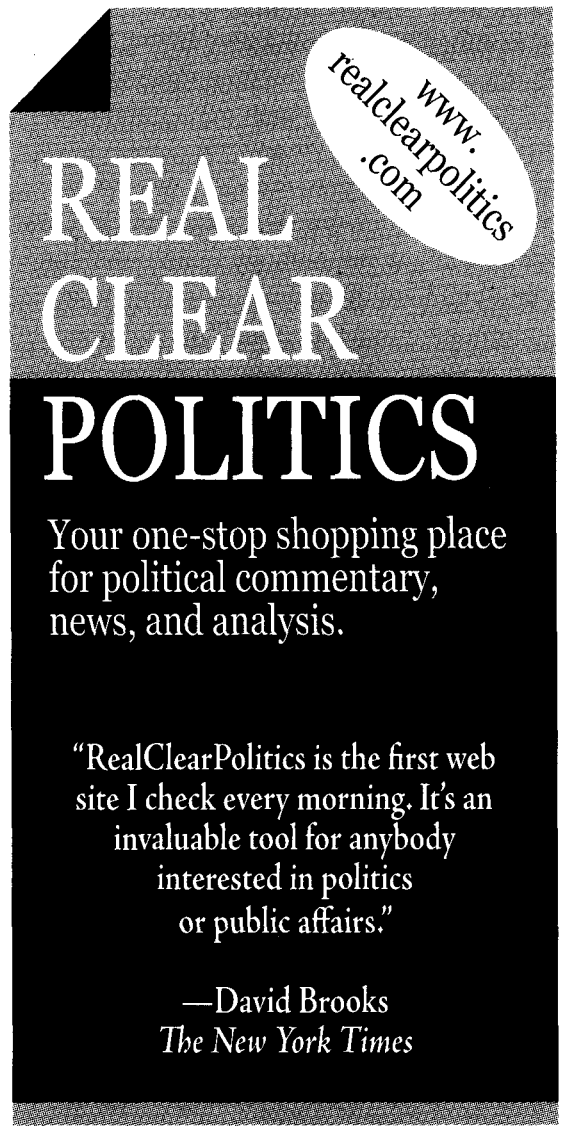
The test of good government was what was necessary to all government. Necessity was put to the fore. In the first papers of *The Federalist*, necessity took the form of calling attention to the present crisis in America, caused by the incompetence of the republic established by the Articles of Confederation. The crisis was both foreign and domestic, and it was a crisis because it was urgent. The face of necessity, the manner in which it first appears and is most impressive, is urgency—in Machiavelli's words, *la necessità che non da tempo* (the necessity that allows no time). And what must be the character of a government's response to an urgent crisis? Energy. And where do we find energy in the government? In the executive. Actually, *The Federalist* introduces the need for energy in government considerably before it associates energy with the executive. To soothe republican partisans, the strong executive must be introduced by stages.

One should not believe that a strong executive is needed only for quick action in emergencies, though that is the function mentioned first. A strong executive is requisite to oppose majority faction produced by temporary delusions in the people. For *The Federalist*, a strong executive must exercise his strength especially against the people, not showing them "servile pliancy." Tocqueville shared this view. Today we think that a strong president is one who leads the people, that is, one who takes them where they want to go, like Andrew Jackson. But Tocqueville contemptuously regarded Jackson as weak for having been "the slave of the majority." Again according to *The Federalist*, the American president will likely have the virtue of responsibility, a new political virtue, now heard so often that it seems to be the only virtue, but first expounded in that work.

"Responsibility" is not mere responsiveness to the people; it means doing what the people would want done if they were apprised of the circumstances. Responsibility requires "personal firmness" in one's character, and it enables those who love fame—"the ruling passion of the noblest minds"—to undertake "extensive and arduous enterprises." Only a strong president can be a great president. Americans are a republican people but they admire their great presidents. Those great presidents—I dare not give a complete list—are not only those who excelled in the emergency of war but those, like Washington, Lincoln, and Franklin Roosevelt, who also deliberately planned and executed enterprises for shaping or reshaping the entire politics of their country. This admiration for presidents extends beyond politics into society, in which Americans, as republicans, tolerate, and appreciate, an amazing amount of one-man rule. The CEO (chief executive officer) is found at the summit of every corporation including universities. I suspect that appreciation for private executives in democratic society was taught by the success of the Constitution's invention of a strong executive in republican politics.

### Expanding Necessities

THE CASE FOR A STRONG EXECUTIVE begins from urgent necessity and extends to necessity in the sense of efficacy and even greatness. It is necessary not merely to respond to circumstances but also in a comprehensive way to seek to anticipate and form them. "Necessary to" the survival of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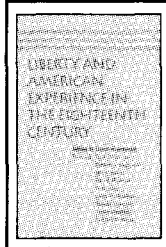

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a society expands to become "necessary for" the good life there, and indeed we look for signs in the way a government acts in emergencies for what it thinks to be good after the emergency has passed. A free government should show its respect for freedom even when it has to take it away. Yet despite the expansion inherent in necessity, the distinction between urgent crises and quiet times remains. Machiavelli called the latter *tempi pacifici*, and he thought that governments could not take them for granted. What works for quiet times is not appropriate in stormy times. John Locke and the American Founders showed a similar understanding to Machiavelli's when they argued for and fashioned a strong executive.

In our time, however, an opinion has sprung up in liberal circles particularly that civil liberties must always be kept intact regardless of circumstances. This opinion assumes that civil liberties have the status of natural liberties, and are inalienable. This means that the Constitution has the status of what was called in the 17th-century natural public law; it is an order as natural as the state of nature from which it emerges. In this view liberty has just one set of laws and institutions that must be kept inviolate, lest it be lost. But Locke was a wiser liberal. His institutions were "constituted," less by creation than by modification of existing institutions in England, but not deduced as invariable consequences of disorder in the state of nature. He retained the difference, and so did the Americans, between natural liberties, inalienable but insecure, and civil liberties, more secure but changeable. Because civil liberties are subject to circumstances, a free constitution needs an institution responsive to circumstances, an executive able to be strong when necessary.

The lesson for us should be that circumstances are much more important for free government than we often believe. Civil liberties are for majorities as well as minorities, and no one should be considered to have rights against society whose exercise would bring society to ruin. The usual danger in a republic is tyranny of the majority, because the majority is the only legitimate dominant force. But in time of war the greater danger may be to the majority from a minority, and the government will be a greater friend than enemy to liberty. Vigilant citizens must be able to adjust their view of the source of danger, and change front if necessary. "Civil liberties" belong to all, not only to the less powerful or less esteemed, and the true balance of liberty and security cannot be taken as given without regard to the threat. Nor is it true that free societies should be judged solely by what they do in quiet times; they should also be judged by the efficacy, and the honorableness, of what they do in war in order to return to peace.

### Judging Our Circumstances

The American constitution is a formal law that establishes an actual contention among its three separated powers. Its formality represents the rule of law, and the actuality arises from which branch better promotes the common good in the event, or in the opinion of the people. In quiet times the rule of law will come to the fore, and the executive can be weak. In stormy times, the rule of law may seem to require the prudence and force that law, or present law, cannot supply, and the executive must be strong. In judging the circumstances of a free society, two parties come to be formed around these two outlooks. These outlooks may not coincide with party principles because they often depend on which branch a party holds and feels obliged to defend: Democrats today would be friendlier to executive power if they held the presidency—and Republicans would discover virtue in the rule of law if they held Congress.

The terms of the disagreement over a strong executive go back to the classic debate between Hamilton (as Pacificus) and Madison (as Helvidius) in 1793-94. Hamilton argued that the executive power, representing the whole country with the energy necessary to defend it, cannot be limited or exhausted. Madison replied that the executive power does not represent the whole country but is determined by its place in the structure of government, which is executing the laws. If carrying on war goes beyond executing the laws, that is all the more reason why the war power should be construed narrowly. Today Republicans and Democrats repeat these arguments when the former declare that we are at war with terrorists and the latter respond that the danger is essentially a matter of law enforcement.

As to the contention that a strong executive prompts a policy of imperialism, I would admit the possibility, and I promise to think carefully and prayerfully about returning Texas to Mexico. In its best moments, America wants to be a model for the world, but no more. In its less good moments, America becomes disgusted with the rest of the world for its failure to imitate our example and follow our advice. I believe that America is more likely to err with isolationism than with imperialism, and that if America is an empire, it is the first empire that always wants an exit strategy. I believe too that the difficulties of the war in Iraq arise from having wished to leave too much to the Iraqis, thus from a sense of inhibition rather than imperial ambition.

*Harvey C. Mansfield is William R. Kenan, Jr., Professor of Government at Harvard University.*



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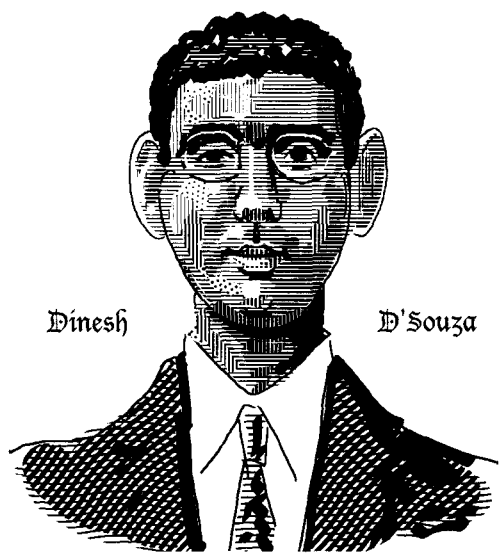
Book Review by Jonah Goldberg

# The Enemy of My Enemy is My Friend

*The Enemy at Home: The Cultural Left and Its Responsibility for 9/11*, by Dinesh D'Souza. Doubleday, 352 pages, $26.95




The left's response to Dinesh D'Souza's *The Enemy at Home* has been predictable. Alan Wolfe, reviewing it for the *New York Times*, all but declared that decent and honorable people should banish D'Souza from public life. The Right's response is more interesting. A reviewer for the paleoconservative journal *Chronicles* writes in "Dinesh the Dhimmi"—no subtlety there—that D'Souza is a "phony conservative" who has "joined" with the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), an organization with reputed terrorist sympathies, to wage war against America. Many right-wing bloggers have been even less kind.

Yet if D'Souza is a "phony conservative," it's hard to know who the real deal is. A former policy advisor for Ronald Reagan, editor of the Heritage Foundation's *Policy Review* (before it moved to the Hoover Institution), a conservative gladiator on the campus speaking circuit, and the author of some of the most successful conservative polemics of the last twenty years, including *Illiberal Education* (1991) and *The End of Racism* (1995), it seems unlikely that D'Souza was a covert liberal in mufti all along.

His latest book's much-discussed argument is that American licentiousness—not our alliance with Israel, or U.S. troops in Saudi Arabia, or any of the other more familiar complaints—is fostering radical Islamic anti-Americanism. He is not subtle on this point, writing from the outset that "the cultural left in this country is responsible for causing 9/11." And while he does muse about how the Left is "secretly allied" with "the movement that bin Laden and Islamic radicals represent" he doesn't quite go so far as to claim the Left is actually fighting for the other side in the war on terror. Rather, it is our "pagan" depravity that most drives Islamic radicals to kill us and it best answers the tiresome but unavoidable question, "Why do they hate us?" D'Souza is unconvinced that widespread poverty, resistance to modern science, or Islam's own internal imperatives play much of a role in jihadism's rise (although he acknowledges that our weak, vacillating foreign policy in the face of Muslim violence hasn't helped, because it signals that our cultural rot has softened our spines). Basically, it's all about the decadent culture that we foist upon the rest of the world.

D'Souza is largely right as far as his argument goes. The problem is that it doesn't go nearly as far as he thinks it does. But let us at least acknowledge that he is surely correct that many Muslims are disgusted by the American spectacle, just as many are fascinated, titillated, and enticed by it—sometimes all at once. As Bernard Lewis has noted, Iran's Ayatollah Khomeini started calling us the Great Satan because Islamic theology emphasizes Satan's role as a seducer. The overly sexual hurly-burly of American life must surely be deeply horrifying and yet also seductive for cultures so—what's the right word?—Repressed? Dysfunctional? Evil? Misogynist? Old-Fashioned? Well, whichever word you think best finishes that sentence will say a lot about your reaction to this book.

It needs to be said that the problem with D'Souza's case is one of emphasis. If one were to make a list of important reasons why the Muslim world or Islamists in particular want to kill us, just about every reasonable person would put the D'Souza thesis on the list, though partisans of particular schools might rank it higher or lower depending on their agendas. But very few would rank our alleged pagan depravity at the top of the list. And virtually no one, save D'Souza himself, would say that our pagan depravity is pretty much the entire list.

D'Souza tries, sometimes valiantly, to dispel competing explanations for jihad. For example, he says several times that Islamists don't hate democracy; in fact they've embraced it. But as he concedes, groups like the Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas, and Hezbollah have only called for more democracy because they know "their group can win." Embracing *elections* so you can gain power and keep it permanently is not quite the same thing as embracing *democracy*. Every party, including the Nazis, gushes about democracy when it wins an election, but constitutional government means abiding by the rules



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when you *lose* an election. One man, one vote, one time, is not democracy; it's will-to-power masquerading as ritualized lever-pulling.

Many of D'Souza's arguments are equally problematic. He pooh-poohs President Bush's statement that "they hate our freedoms" and complains that the Islamists aren't "anti-modern." The 9/11 hijackers had considerable technological expertise, he notes. But this is a fairly pinched argument about what constitutes "modernism." Nazi ideologues embraced technology, too, from poison gas and V2 rockets to the Autobahn and the X-ray machine. But they also subscribed to a deeply reactionary vision of the pre-Christian, pre-Enlightenment German soul. Jeffrey Herf famously dubbed the Nazis "reactionary moderns" for their ability to simultaneously embrace the accoutrement of modernity while harboring barbarously backward ideas. The Nazis represented, in Goebbels's words, a "steel-like romanticism of the twentieth century." And it should be noted, the Nazis were not suffering from cognitive dissonance, but perverse ideology. Similarly, the Islamists seem like perfect reactionary moderns. They wage jihad, using laptops and IEDs, to impose the burka, destroy art, and crush homosexuals.

D'Souza has a grating tendency to take the Koran as well as jihadist writings and propaganda at face value when they support his thesis. When Islamist rhetoric turns to the Jews or Christians or oil or troops in Saudi Arabia, he becomes dismissive. This sort of cherry-picking has a familiar feel. In an eloquent review in these pages, Gerard Alexander noted how liberal students of anti-Americanism tend to see the things they don't like about America reflected back in the perverted narcissus pool of global anti-Americanism ("Blame America First," Winter 2006/07). In other words, anti-Americanism is the voice the world gives to *my grievances*. This seems to be what D'Souza is doing. He is identifying things about America he does not like—divorce, pornography, abortion, etc.—and saying: see, *this* is why they don't like us.

LIBERAL CRITICS HAVE GLOATED OVER the book's argument as a glaring example of conservative hypocrisy. After all, conservatives have long complained that the Left "blames America first." But cries of hypocrisy tend to be among the weakest forms of refutation since the critic is basically castigating the hypocrite for accepting the critic's own position. In this case, liberals find it outrageous to blame America first when it's *their* vision of America getting blamed. In this way, D'Souza lucidly applies liberal logic to what he believes are conservative ends. For decades, liberals have argued that there is a powerful connection between America at home and America abroad. Particularly in the Cold War's early years, leftists and liberals alike argued that American racism at home was hurting our efforts to win hearts and minds abroad. (To be sure, leftists cared about civil rights, but they were also powerfully motivated by the desire to beat up on America and bolster the image of Communist regimes, many of which were scoring enormous public relations victories from Jim Crow.) But given the weight the Left gives to solidarity and its animosity to the idea that one good might come at the expense of another, they cannot accept that Muslims, Third Worlders, and other brothers in the Coalition of the Oppressed might be even more put off by a gay pride parade than by the suppression of a civil rights march. In short, D'Souza is right that the bawdy spectacle of Hollywood and the Left sometimes makes America's job harder.

But here's my primary objection: I don't care. There's something about *The Enemy at Home* that gets the Irish up, even in a guy named Goldberg. I can criticize and complain about my brother all I like, but if my brother bothers somebody outside the family, well, that's just too bad. Similarly, Ted Kennedy may or may not be a Caligulan carbuncle, but if the jihadists want to behead him for it, they'll have to get through me first. In short, if our debauchery fuels Islamic terrorists to kill us, the blame for that still resides entirely with the terrorists. One can wholeheartedly agree that some Americans make poor use of their freedom, and that certain behavior shouldn't be promoted, but that's our problem. And if it makes it harder for us to make our case to the Muslim world, then harder it must be.

In the end, President Bush was right. They *do* hate our freedom. They hate other stuff too, to be sure. But quite a bit of what offends the jihadis flows from the fact that we are free. Indeed, even our support of Israel—which as D'Souza notes baffles many in the Middle East—is in the end the result of our freedom. Free countries support free countries. Or at least they are supposed to. "We understand your interests," a Muslim lawyer who is baffled by our support for Israel, allegedly in defiance of our national interest, tells D'Souza. "We don't understand your ideals." Just so.

For example, D'Souza's claim that when it comes to "core beliefs" he has more in common with the Grand Mufti of Egypt than with Michael Moore, simply won't hold. Which beliefs? Sure, Ali Gomaa is against gay marriage, but he also thinks sculpture should be banned and believes Jews are "bloodsuckers." D'Souza would have to keep the conversation pretty constrained for him to stay eye-to-eye with the Mufti.

LASTLY, SOMETHING NEEDS TO BE SAID about the angry reaction from certain quarters on the Right. Criticizing such a prominent fellow conservative could be a sign of conservatism's own intellectual health, but it could also be a sign of a new, right-wing political correctness. The Islamists reportedly proselytize with the slogan "Islam is the solution." For some on the Right the mantra is "Islam is the problem." They will not stomach D'Souza's fine distinctions between good Muslims and bad ones. The use of the word "dhimmi" is a good example. Muslims use this term to describe non-Muslims who agree to live under the yoke of Islamic rule and Sharia law. Some right-wingers have begun using it in much the same way their counterparts in previous eras referred to "collaborators," "Commie symps," or "fellow travelers." We aren't near the point where a respectable conservative says "the only good Muslim is a dead Muslim," but one can smell the whiff of sulfur bubbling to the top of certain swamps.

Dinesh D'Souza should be congratulated for starting from the premise that not every Muslim is our enemy simply because he is Muslim. The West can't get rid of Islam, nor should it try to. Unlike Communism, which ran against the traditional grains of the societies it conquered, Islam *is* the tradition of these societies. Hence, D'Souza's argument for reaching out to moderates and traditionalists in the Islamic world is a defensible approach given the paucity of alternatives. The problem, as critics often very capably demonstrate, is that there is also a severe paucity of moderates and traditionalists on whom the U.S. can rely. So, we've got a big problem. The Left wants to say we don't really have a problem at all. And some on the Right want to make it much bigger than it is. Unfortunately, D'Souza's analysis doesn't succeed at finding a defensible middle ground. But he deserves credit for trying.

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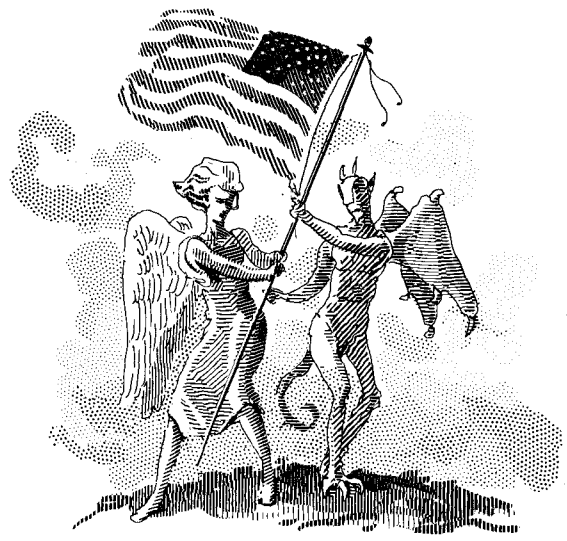
Book Review by Michael M. Uhlmann

# A Tell-All with Nothing to Tell

*The Theocons: Secular America Under Siege*, by Damon Linker.
Doubleday, 288 pages, $26



Like audiences who pay to peek between their fingers at horror movies, certain liberals love to frighten themselves with nightmarish visions of an America governed by religious zealots. The specific imagined terrors vary by writer and occasion, but their common theme is that a sizeable portion of the electorate would, if it could, reunite church and state. Although the proposition is risibly preposterous, those who warm their fantasies before such fires love to tremble at the imminent prospect of thumbscrew and rack. And there's a ready answer when the dreaded consequence fails to materialize: ask a man who believes in vampires whether he's actually encountered one, and likely as not he'll point to his garlic necklace saying, "Of course not, I take precautions."

In fiction as opposed to real life, nightmarish scenarios do come to pass, as for example in Margaret Atwood's widely touted 1985 novel, *The Handmaid's Tale*, which sketched a totalitarian America born again as a Christian fundamentalist state. Many mainstream reviewers praised the work as a thinly disguised if somewhat exaggerated account of what would happen if the Religious Right ever came to power. For many who dine out on this sort of stuff, George W. Bush's election and re-election threatened to make fiction all too real. Why this should be so is hard to say. True, Bush has made a particular point of wooing the "traditional values coalition," but so has every Republican president since Richard Nixon. In the broad political context of the past four decades, Bush's position on the so-called "social issues" is not radically different from most of his GOP predecessors. Whatever the explanation, the run-up to the 2006 congressional elections gave birth to yet another gush of books and articles on the sinister motives of the GOP and its conservative religious supporters. The most celebrated was Kevin Phillips's *American Theocracy* (2006), a near-paranoid rant against (in more or less equal parts) the Bush family's baleful influence, their business allies' oligarchical pretensions, and the Religious Right's theocratic predilections. About the only thing missing from the Phillips account was the familiar Monty Python line announcing the Spanish Inquisition.

That omission has now been remedied by Damon Linker's *The Theocons: Secular America Under Siege*. Linker argues that critics who worry about the threat posed by Protestant evangelicals are worrying about the infantry when they should be paying attention to Central Command. In case you haven't been following important developments to which the author is privy, Central Command consists of a coterie of (mostly) Catholic intellectuals who are associated with *First Things* magazine and its founding publisher, Fr. Richard John Neuhaus. Welcome to the inner sanctum of the "theoconservatives," where wily theologians and political philosophers labor night and day to tear down Thomas Jefferson's wall of separation. Their goal, writes Linker, is "to sanctify and spiritualize the nation's public life, while also eliding fundamental distinctions between church and state, the sacred and the secular."

> Such efforts, if successful, would not be fatal to the nation, but they would cripple it, effectively transforming the country into what would be recognized around the world as a Catholic-Christian republic. I hope that prospect is disquieting enough to inspire thoughtful American citizens to educate themselves about the theocons, their ideology, and the very real threat that they pose to the United States.

More about this presently. Consider first, however, the book jacket. The top of the front cover features a drawing of the White House with a prominent cross upon its roof. In case that bit of subtlety eludes you, the cover goes on to proclaim: "FOR THE PAST THREE DECADES, a few determined men have worked to inject their radical religious ideas into the nation's politics. This is the story of how they succeeded."

If your paranoia remains unaroused, check out the back cover, where large boldface letters at the top ask, "WHAT DO YOU BELIEVE ABOUT AMERICA?" This is followed by a series of sub-questions, in somewhat smaller type, beginning with "Do you believe the Catholic Church should be actively intervening in American politics on the side of the Republican Party?" and ending with "Do you believe the United States should be a Christian nation?" Then, in larger boldface font again, "The theocons answer YES to all of these questions. DO YOU?"



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The back cover's concluding paragraph warns that if theocons have their way, "the political and cultural landscape of our country [will be transformed] to such an extent that the separation of church and state as we have known it will cease to exist." To put it gently, the cover material is crude, heavy-duty propaganda of a sort traditionally associated with unsavory pamphleteers of malign inclination. What it's doing in a work that wishes to be understood as a serious analysis of an important intellectual phenomenon is a question best answered by Mr. Linker and his agent.

As with most works of this genre, the plot unfolds more by insinuation than by actual argument. While the book purports to be a tell-all insider's tale (Linker served as the editor of *First Things* from May 2001 until February 2005), the text doesn't begin to support the dust jacket's lurid anticipations. He does briefly address the work of a number of Catholic intellectuals associated with Fr. Neuhaus's various projects (e.g., Michael Novak, George Weigel, Robert P. George, Mary Ann Glendon), as well as the ideas of a few fellow-traveling non-Catholics (e.g., Hadley Arkes, Charles Colson, and Leon Kass). His analysis of their thought, however, is at best superficial, yielding little more than the obvious observation that *First Things* acts as an intellectual magnet for moralists of conservative disposition. Imagine that.

The particular focus of Linker's concerns is Fr. Neuhaus, for whom (despite protestations to the contrary) the author bears a rather active dislike. Although other players perform cameo roles in this account, Linker suggests that Fr. Neuhaus stands at the head of a cabal whose animating goals are fundamentally at war with the American political tradition. Linker's evidence on this point relies heavily on a rehash of the controversial November 1996 *First Things* symposium, "The End of Democracy? The Judicial Usurpation of Politics," in which Robert Bork, Russell Hittinger, Charles Colson, Hadley Arkes, and Robert P. George excoriated the Supreme Court for various sins of omission and commission. Individual differences aside, their collective indictment advanced two propositions: that the Court was arrogantly disdainful of public sentiment on moral and cultural issues, and that the justices were substituting their own ideological preferences for constitutional text and tradition.

The controversy arose from a few sentences in a number of the essays, and above all in Fr. Neuhaus's pungent introduction, suggesting that the Court had in effect created a new constitutional order, and questioning whether conscientious citizens should give their assent to it. The resulting brouhaha on the latter point caused a major rift among long-time ideological allies and prompted three members of the *First Things* editorial board to resign. Criticisms and replies filled many pages, not only in *First Things* but also in other leading journals of opinion, including *Commentary*, which countered with a symposium of its own. (For those who are interested, the entire exchange, including a lengthy defense and reassessment by Fr. Neuhaus, has been republished in book form by Spence Publishing.)

Viewed ten years on, the differences may be more prudential than substantive. Some of the rhetoric in the original symposium was undoubtedly over the top, but the core of the indictment deserves to be addressed: what *is* to be done about unelected judges who claim that autonomous individualism is the guiding moral philosophy of the Constitution? Instead, Linker uses the controversy to suggest that Fr. Neuhaus and his allies pose a different and more dangerous threat to the American way of life. Their first loyalty, he avers, is not to the Constitution but to Catholic doctrine, which they wish to read into American constitutional law. This, he asserts, is the true lesson of the whole controversy—one that also reveals itself in efforts by Neuhaus & Co. to influence policy on everything from abortion and stem-cell research to foreign affairs.

This is an old canard of disreputable lineage, and although it once enjoyed widespread support among intellectuals of a certain description, Mr. Linker does himself no credit in seeking to revive it now. The credibility of his charge is further undermined by his own history. The controversy surrounding the *First Things* symposium, on which Linker places such great weight, occurred five years *before* he became the magazine's editor. The issues, including those he highlights, had been vetted *ad infinitum* not to say *ad nauseam* in many journals, yet he sought and accepted a major position in what he now describes as an unsavory enterprise. He stayed on in that position for another four years without voicing his dissent. That's a long time for one who now accuses his former colleagues of seeking to impose sectarian beliefs upon an unsuspecting public; and it raises serious questions about his bona fides.

Herewith a personal note. I am well acquainted with most of the figures discussed in Linker's book. Some are close friends or former colleagues with whom I have deliberated or worked on matters of common interest. Over many years I have passed countless hours in energetic conversation (or as Hadley Arkes likes to say, in heated agreement) with almost all of them, either one-on-one or in small gatherings, on every sort of matter both grave and lighthearted. I have written frequently for *First Things* and participated in a number of symposia conducted under the magazine's auspices or that of its affiliated think-tank, the Institute on Religion and Public Life. Linker to the contrary notwithstanding, the animating spirit of those who are drawn to the magazine and its various causes is not a desire to instantiate some kind of Catholic-Christian regime but rather a deep and abiding hope that the American proposition, rightly understood, can be restored.

"Rightly understood" is of course a loaded phrase, the content of which is today hotly disputed. The central divide in our time lies between those who believe that the heart of the American proposition consists in its dedication to universal principles of natural right, and those who deny that any such principles exist. Broadly speaking, the former camp includes everyone from Thomas Jefferson and Abraham Lincoln to Harry V. Jaffa and the late John Paul II, as well as Fr. Neuhaus and his allies. Despite various theological or philosophical differences, all would agree with Jefferson when he asked, "Can the liberties of a nation be thought secure when we have removed their only firm basis, a conviction in the minds of the people that these liberties are of the gift of God?" Modernists or postmodernists of various stripes, by contrast, tend to believe that Jefferson was here indulging so much metaphysical twaddle, and that his answer to his own question, which he set forth, so to speak, in the Declaration of Independence, was mere high-falutin' rhetoric. Among those who belong to this latter school may be found most teachers of constitutional law in our time and, alas, most members of the Supreme Court.

Where Mr. Linker comes out on this framing of the question I cannot say. But he accuses Fr. Neuhaus *et al.* of violating what he calls "the liberal bargain," by which he means that "religious believers are required to leave their theological passions and certainties out of public life...." At that level of generality, Linker would have to characterize the likes of Martin Luther King, Jr., and the late William Sloane Coffin as enemies of the liberal bargain too, but surely he cannot mean that. Two sentences later, he fleshes out his thought, but in a manner that only compounds the confusion:

> The privatization of piety creates social space for every American to worship God as he or she wishes, without state interference. In return for this freedom, believers are expected *only* to give up the ambition



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> to political rule *in the name of their faith*—that is, the ambition to bring the whole of social life into conformity with their own inevitably partial and sectarian theological convictions. (Italics in original.)

What he means by "the privatization of piety" is hard to say. Would he argue, for example, that "under God" in the Pledge of Allegiance violates the liberal bargain? If so, he needs to include virtually all members of the national legislature in his indictment. It was only a few years ago, after all, that a clear majority in Congress voted to condemn the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals for ruling that "under God" in the Pledge violated the Establishment Clause.

And what about the executive branch? Early on in the book, as evidence of dangerous religious encroachment, Linker notes ominously that certain modern presidents have at times concluded their addresses to the nation by saying "God bless America." Is he suggesting that that custom must also go by the boards? But if references to God in presidential speeches offend the liberal bargain, Linker will have to read George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, Woodrow Wilson, and Franklin Roosevelt (among others) out of the American political tradition as well.

Does his mandate for "the privatization of piety" also cover speeches by Supreme Court justices? Consider, for example, Chief Justice Earl Warren in 1954:

> I believe no one can read the history of our country without realizing that the Good Book and the spirit of the Savior have from the beginning been our guiding geniuses.... I like to believe we are living today in the spirit of the Christian religion. I like also to believe that as long as we do so, no great harm can come to our country.

On Linker's premise concerning "the liberal bargain," the mere utterance of such sentiments by a Chief Justice should be cause for alarm. And while we're at it, what about the crier's "Oyez! Oyez! Oyez!" that opens every sitting of the justices, the invocation that ends with "God save the United States and this Honorable Court"?

Merely to raise such questions suggests the fragility of Linker's governing standard concerning the propriety of religious sentiment in American political discourse. What precisely does he mean when he says that the liberal bargain requires believers "to give up the ambition to political rule *in the name of their faith*"? Linker's italics are important, because he wishes to suggest that Neuhaus and others like him are engaged in an illicit effort to baptize the American political order. I read recently that a Lutheran pastor in the Midwest has kept track of everything Fr. Neuhaus has written. The current total, apparently, stands at a staggering six million words. From time to time in that vast outpouring Neuhaus has no doubt indulged in rhetorical overreach and said all sorts of things that in the light of cool reflection he wishes he hadn't. He is among other things a powerful writer, a passionate advocate, and a preacher of considerable eloquence, who has been refreshingly candid about some of his rhetorical sins, offenses, and negligences.

But in the great bulk of his political advocacy, the fire and the passion are informed by appeals to his fellow citizens based on reasoned argument that does not depend for its validity on any sort of doctrinal affirmation. It is a travesty to suggest otherwise. Fr. Neuhaus openly acknowledges the extent to which his understanding of politics has been profoundly influenced by the Catholic tradition, but his public policy arguments on such matters as abortion, euthanasia, and the First Amendment's proper meaning are hardly sectarian appeals. Linker, however, seems to believe that any sort of reliance on natural moral philosophy is indistinguishable from appeals based on religious doctrine. To take one of his favorite *bêtes noires*, embryonic stem-cell research, which undergoes heavy drubbing in this book, he argues that Neuhaus's opposition exemplifies his effort to make Catholic doctrine the law of the land. Linker might wish to have a talk with Charles Krauthammer, whom no one has accused of flirting with Catholic doctrine. In a recent column, Krauthammer said this:

> You don't need religion to tremble at the thought of unrestricted embryo research. You simply have to have a healthy respect for the human capacity for doing evil in the pursuit of the good. Once we have taken the position of many stem-cell advocates that embryos are discardable tissue with no more intrinsic value than a hangnail or an appendix, then all barriers are down.

Fr. Neuhaus and his colleagues realize full well that reasonable people can and do disagree about such difficult issues, and they would be the first to say that their political resolution must depend on moral reasoning independent of any scriptural authority. (They also add that the people's right to resolve such questions should not be usurped by judges who impose their own special brand of sectarianism.) Linker is at great pains to tie moral philosophy of the sort embraced by Fr. Neuhaus to specifically Catholic doctrine because, by so doing, he can then argue that Neuhaus's advocacy offends "the liberal bargain." But Linker's liberal bargain is so narrowly defined that he has to rewrite most of American history to make his argument stick. In castigating Fr. Neuhaus for applying his distinctive brand of moral reasoning to constitutional matters, he ignores a long train of American moral and political figures who thought along similar lines. Consider John Adams, no lover of churches he, who wrote, "Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other." In uttering that sentiment, Adams spoke for most members of the founding generation. Though for the most part an unchurched lot, they were hardly indifferent to the importance of morals in the effort to preserve republican liberty. Although Fr. Neuhaus most often speaks in the rhetorical rhythms associated today with the Catholic Church, there is nothing uniquely Catholic in what he has to say about the consequences of contemporary moral autonomism for the American regime. In *The Naked Public Square* (1984) and other writings to which Linker takes strong exception, Fr. Neuhaus harkens back to an earlier time when most citizens, regardless of sectarian differences, understood the necessity of controlling human appetites. Without that constraint, as Edmund Burke famously remarked, men forego their capacity for civil liberty.

Damon Linker is determined to keep religion out of the public square on the assumption that only by doing so can a decent neutrality be maintained regarding religious sentiment. But as Fr. Neuhaus has pointed out again and again, a religion-free public square is anything but neutral. That space will be filled, indeed is being filled, by the nostrums of relativism and the assertions of moral autonomy. It is hardly an idle question to ask whether the American proposition can be sustained under such conditions. And it is hardly un-American to argue, as Fr. Neuhaus does with passionate eloquence, that Christian thought has much to teach us about the nature and importance of an objective moral order. Just ask Earl Warren.

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Book Review by Victor Davis Hanson

# Church Militant

*God's War: A New History of the Crusades*, by Christopher Tyerman.
The Belknap Press, 1,040 pages, $35

Since September 11, few historical events have been evoked more frequently than the Christian Crusades to the Holy Land (1095-1291). To Osama bin Laden's fossilized mind, they happened almost yesterday: modern Israel's brief existence in Palestine is analogous to the 200-year Frankish occupation of the Levant; Israel's acquisition of Jerusalem, following the Six-Day War, is every bit as repugnant as the First Crusade that put Westerners in control of the holy city for nearly a century (1099-1187). More important, bin Laden believes that, like the Crusades, the current clash of civilizations will persist for decades until the infidels' inevitable defeat and withdrawal—in acknowledgment of the greater will of Islam. As this would-be Saladin explained in an October 2001 interview with *al-Jazeera*:

> This is a battle of Muslims against the global crusaders.... God, who provided us with his support and kept us steadfast until the Soviet Union was defeated, is able to provide us once more with his support to defeat America on the same land and with the same people.
>
> In a war of civilizations, our goal is for our nation to unite in the face of the Christian crusade.... This is a recurring war. The original crusade brought Richard [the Lionheart] from Britain, Louis from France, and Barbarossa from Germany. Today the crusading countries rushed as soon as Bush raised the cross. They accepted the rule of the cross.

Although bin Laden and Dr. Zawahiri—al-Qaeda's Alfred Rosenberg-like theoretician—refer to the hated crusaders often, Western leaders go to great pains to avoid even the memory of those once-upon-a-time religious pests. It's not merely that President Bush and Tony Blair fear framing the war against terror in terms of an age-old religious clash, or even an embarrassing postcolonial replay. It's that the Western public as a whole remains deeply ashamed of their crusading ancestors' zealotry and intolerance. In the words of Christopher Tyerman, a lecturer in medieval history at Hertford College and New College, Oxford, the knights who took the cross have "entered the sphere of public history, where the past is captured in abiding cultural myths of inheritance, self-image and identity. Many groups and nations find their memory awkward, even distressing."

Just distressing? So toxic has the word "crusade" become in the age of political correctness that we increasingly avoid it altogether; banished are once common expressions like the crusade against drugs or against illiteracy. Western secularism explains much of this hand-wringing, since our elites believe that Christian fundamentalists who advocate things like Bible study in schools are not much different from radical Islamists who blow up heretics and infidels.

What is lost is any recollection that at the time of the Crusades, an ascendant Islam was occupying Spain and Portugal—after failing at Poitiers in the 8th century to take France. Or that Greek-speaking Byzantium was under a constant assault that would culminate in the Muslim occupation of much of the European Balkans, and later still produce Islamic armies at the gates of Vienna. Few remember, either, that the eastern Mediterranean coastal lands originally had been Phoenician and Jewish, then Persian, then Macedonian, then Roman, then Byzantine—and not, until the 7th century, Islamic. Whether intentionally or not, we have accepted bin Laden's frame of reference: that religiously intolerant Crusaders had gratuitously started a war to take something that was not theirs. That the Ottomans subsequently occupied the Levant for nearly 500 years as unapologetic imperialists seems to matter little to either bin Laden or the West, inasmuch as that brutal subjugation can be understood as an internecine squabble, not a cross-cultural vendetta instigated by Westerners.

Christopher Tyerman's thousand-page *God's War* is not oblivious to this post-9/11 controversy over the Crusades. Indeed, he candidly informs us that his "perspective is western European. This accords best with my own research experience." And he further confesses that as a descendent of Crusaders himself, he has plenty of paradoxes to explore, which he insists are best understood through the labyrinth of European church-state politics of the 11th through 13th centuries.

But after that brief throat-clearing, there is almost no reference at all to the relevance of the Crusades to the modern Western struggle against radical Islamists from the Middle East. Instead, he judiciously reminds us, "This study is intended as a history, not a polemic, an account not a judgment...not a confessional apo-



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logia or a witness statement in some cosmic law suit." About the closest we get to contemporary allusion is something like the banal, "Thus Islam's holy war, the lesser *jihad*, remains a modern phenomenon."

Well, then, if this erudite, disinterested, and exhaustive study offers almost no enlightenment about the context of our own episode in the long history of Christian-Muslim strife, why such a massive history now? Tyerman, of course, consciously writes in the shadow of Sir Steven Runciman's three-volume *History of the Crusades* (1951-4), a magisterial account that is ensured a place alongside Prescott's *History of the Conquest of Mexico* and Churchill's *The Second World War* as one of the most elegantly written prose narratives in modern English. "It would be folly and hubris," admits Tyerman, "to pretend to compete, to match, as it were, my clunking computer keyboard with [Runciman's] pen, at once a rapier and a paintbrush; to pit one volume however substantial, with the breadth, scope and elegance of his three." Tyerman is right there, for Sir Steven would never have written sentences like this clunker: "The increasing interiorization of faith, shared to some degree by all sides of the major confessional divides, mitigated against certain of the showier forms of medieval devotions that crusading exemplified, the increasingly controversial sale of indulgences merely being the most notorious." Even when (relatively) succinct, Tyerman often cannot convey a simple thought with clarity: "Both activities are open to reductive interpretations of unavoidable cultural or social compulsion."

IF TYERMAN IS, TO BE FRANK, A VERY POOR stylist, he nevertheless offers many things new and insightful—besides drawing on a half-century's worth of archaeological, historical, and epigraphical scholarship since the time of Runciman. Though Tyerman seems oblivious to contemporary comparisons he rightly insists on viewing both the Crusaders and their enemies in the context of their times. Thus he refuses to pass easy moral judgments on people who, in comparison with our own affluence and ease, lived short and miserable lives. It isn't a question of whether Richard the Lionheart (who in a few hours executed 2,600 Muslim prisoners) or Saladin (who butchered the Templars and Hospitallers after their defeat at Hattin) was cruel, but rather cruel compared to what?

Important here is Tyerman's stance towards religiosity. He reminds us throughout the narrative that it was not merely glory or money or excitement that drove Westerners of all classes and nationalities to risk their lives in a deadly journey to an inhospitable east, but a real belief in a living God and their own desire to please Him through preserving and honoring the birth and death places of His son. The Crusaders were not merely religious in the modern sense of devout or church-going; akin to present-day Muslims, they cleaved to religion as the ruling element in almost every aspect of their lives. The Crusades arose when the Church, in the absence of strong secular governments, commanded the moral authority to ignite the religious passions of thousands of Europeans—and the Crusades ceased when at last the Church lost such stature.

Tyerman offers some surprising revisionism. One of the great heroes of the Muslim world is the magnetic Kurd, al-Malik al-Nasir Slah al-Dunya wa'l-Din Abu'l Muzaffar Yusuf ibn Ayyub Ibn Shadi al-Kurdi, better known as Salah al-Din or Saladin, sultan of Egypt, who ensured that the Third Crusade would fail and that Richard the Lionheart would return to Europe without recapturing Jerusalem. But as Tyerman notes, most of Saladin's early efforts were aimed at consolidating power by killing other Muslims. Defeated by Christian armies at Montgisard, Forbelet, Arsuf, and Jaffa, he lost both Tyre and Antioch—despite the numerical and logistical advantages of his home terrain. His chief virtue was his skill as a diplomatic chess-master. He exploited the political differences among the Crusaders, adeptly dividing them against themselves.

For most moderns, the absurdity and hypocrisy of a struggle to restore Christianity in the Holy Land is best exemplified by the so-called Fourth Crusade, in which Western Europeans sacked Constantinople (1204), killing thousands of fellow (Orthodox) Christians and weakening the Eastern church to such a degree that its subsequent defeat by the Ottomans two centuries later was nearly preordained. But Tyerman reminds us that nearly half of the Crusaders had defected and returned home, once the "diversion" to Constantinople was decided upon. The other half, mostly Venetians, were excommunicated in advance of the siege. "Neither some fanciful conspiracy nor a general mind-set allegedly susceptible to anti-Greek propaganda adequately explains the course of events," he writes. "Instead, conflicting ties of solidarity, honor, obligation and advantage exerted the strongest pressures." He concludes that the motives of the Crusaders were "immediate, contradictory, self-deluding and muddled rather than treacherous or malign."

Finally, time ran out under the walls of Byzantium; supplies were exhausted and the inept Crusaders were forced to assault the city. The subsequent looting and desecration of icons and art were devastating. The killing was mostly sporadic and limited to the first day of the attack—the infamy magnified, however, by the failure to kill Muslims to the south, and the hatred between Catholicism and Orthodoxy. "If the victors had proceeded to the Holy Land the following spring," Tyerman writes, "the fall of Constantinople may have never acquired its reputation for unique barbarism."

IF THERE ARE FEW VIVID BATTLE ACCOUNTS in this dry retelling, he does admirably locate the Crusades in both a larger European and global context. The first Crusade, for example, arose as a complex response both to the Investiture Contest with the German king Henry IV (part of the Church's effort to purge its corruptions and confirm its authority over European kings), and to the call of the Byzantine Emperor Alexis, who thought Western Christians might save his eroding rule from the Seljuk Turks. A crusade against the Muslims, it was believed, would restore the Church's prestige by a demonstration of selfless zeal at home and of increased status and power abroad. Once Tyerman guides us through this labyrinth of contemporary agendas and self-interested motives, the decision to send thousands of novice soldiers to the other end of the Mediterranean somehow does not seem so lunatic.

By the same token, he envisions the Crusades in the broadest sense, well beyond the interventions into the Holy Land. *God's War* includes chapters on the collective and transnational Christian efforts against unbelievers in the Balkans, Scandinavia, and Russia, as well as against the Ottomans and their clients in the Balkans extending into the 15th century.

In the eleventh hour before the impending Renaissance, Reformation, and Enlightenment, the Church belatedly sought to galvanize the faithful to an almost feverish effort at global crusading, sending its tentacles outward as the nerve center at home enervated. What, then, finally ended the crusading spirit? Not loss of pious devotion or belief in God per se, but rather the rise of the modern, competent, secular state, which won the primary allegiance of millions of devout Europeans, who increasingly rendered unto Caesar what was Caesar's. Christopher Tyerman's exhaustive new history is not easy going, but it is often surprising and ironic—reminding us that the crusading spirit is properly seen as tragic rather than melodramatic, and thus "cannot be explained, excused or dismissed either as virtue or sin. Rather, its very contradictions spelt its humanity."

*Victor Davis Hanson is a senior fellow in classics and military history at the Hoover Institution, Stanford University, and the author most recently of* A War Like No Other: How the Athenians and Spartans Fought the Peloponnesian War *(Random House).*



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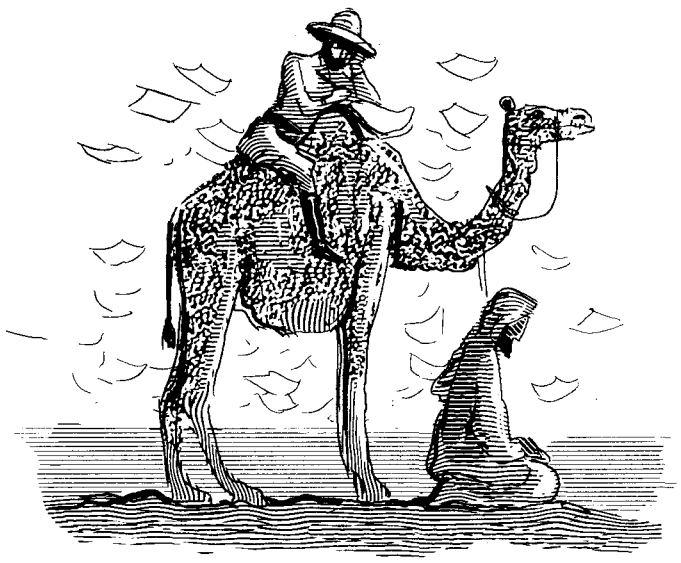
Essay by Algis Valiunas

# Encountering Islam



In 1978, Edward Said, the late Palestinian-American professor of English at Columbia University, published *Orientalism*, a study that condemns virtually all Western literature and scholarship on Islamic matters as an instrument of imperialism. The Orient, he maintains, is the Orientalists' invention. There is in fact no Islamic civilization that circumscribes the thoughts and feelings of individual Muslims. Rather there are numberless individuals who happen to be Muslims, and who are every bit as singular in their experiences as their counterparts in Christendom, so that to spout sonorous generalities about Islamic types is an unforgivable imaginative and moral failure. In describing this Islamic Orient that doesn't exist in the first place, Western writers always get it wrong. Although Said discreetly avoids describing in any detail what a true representation would be, one gathers from scattered remarks that his Muslims are universally tolerant, peace-loving, moderate in their religious devotion, and passionate in their pursuit of political freedom—essentially indistinguishable from their Western brethren in everything but the experience of Western oppression.

Said criticizes several distinguished professors of Oriental Studies—Louis Massignon, Sir Hamilton Gibb, Bernard Lewis—but he reserves a special disdain for some of the great Western literary travelers through Muslim lands, such as Chateaubriand, Edward Lane, Gustave Flaubert, Richard F. Burton, Charles Doughty, and T.E. Lawrence. So varied and intelligent a group of writers surely deserves a second look. The Western encounter with Islam goes back to the Middle Ages, but even if we follow Said and confine our attention to the past two centuries or so, the picture that emerges is far different from the one painted in *Orientalism*. The travel literature is far more open-minded and perceptive than Said's animadversions suggest, and besides, he leaves out important figures like Alexis de Tocqueville, John Lloyd Stephens, Mark Twain, and Robert Byron. These writers were all earnest searchers after Islamic civilization, and contrary to Said's caricature, what they observed can instruct us still.

### Yesterday's Clash of Civilizations

If there is a writer in this company who nearly fits Said's description of the Orientalist enterprise, it is François-Auguste-René, Vicomte de Chateaubriand, best known as a memoirist, diplomat, panegyrist of Christianity, and novelist of American Indian noble savagery. His *Itinéraire de Paris à Jérusalem* (1811) extols French martial pride in its collision with Levantine thuggery, trembles at the mystery of sacred places irradiated by eternity, derogates the Arab greed that now prevails in the Holy Land where Jesus preached charity, celebrates the superior piety of the Arab Christians, and reviles the sacrilegious monstrosity of the savage Mussulman. Against the sanctity of Jerusalem—or at least of its Christian vestiges—he pits the hopeless sensuality of Constantinople, where no man is master of himself. Egypt he laments as "the land where civilization was born and where ignorance and barbarism reign today." The Arabs may live "in the Orient whence all the arts, all the sciences, all the religions emerged," but they are little better than primitives now. "[W]ith the American Indian everything declares that the savage has never reached the state of civilization," he writes, "while with the Arab everything indicates that the civilized man has fallen back into a state of savagery."

Between such a race and the peoples of Christendom the natural condition is war. In the Crusades, sweet justice crossed swords with the forces of darkness, and the world would be a better place had the conflict been settled then once and for all. The Crusades "had to do, not only with the deliverance of the Holy Sepulcher, but with the question of which ought to prevail on earth, a religion inimical to civilization, systematically disposed to ignorance, to despotism, to slavery, or a religion which revived among the moderns the genius of sage antiquity and which abolished servitude.... The spirit of Mahometanism is persecution and conquest; the Gospel on the contrary preaches only tolerance and peace." Preaching tolerance and peace leaves Chateaubriand positively sweat-soaked with war fever.

But he had his reasons. The insults and injuries to which Christians and Jews are subjected under Muslim tyranny rub him raw. The priestly order that watches over Christ's tomb, Chateaubriand observes, is endlessly humiliated and tormented at the hands of Turkish



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officialdom. The situation for the Jew is worse still:

> Particular object of all contempt, he bows his head without complaint; he suffers all insults without asking for justice; he lets himself be showered with blows without sighing; if someone calls for his head, he presents it at the cemetery.... [O]ne has to see these rightful masters of Judea slaves and strangers in their own country; one has to see them awaiting, under all these oppressions, a king who shall deliver them.

Jews in Jerusalem, Chateaubriand writes, live as Frenchmen did under the Reign of Terror. But then so do the Muslims, although it is Muslims who rule:

> Accustomed to follow the fortunes of a master, they have no law that connects them to ideas of order and political moderation: to kill, when one is the stronger, seems to them a legitimate right; they exercise that right or submit to it with the same indifference.... They don't know liberty; they have no property rights; force is their God.

In Said's view, these are all calumnies, and Chateaubriand is the polluted wellspring from which the tales of subsequent travelers flow.

### Rule Over the Muslim

ALEXIS DE TOCQUEVILLE, WHOSE writings on Algeria Said does not mention, tells a different story. In his two "Letters on Algeria" (1837) that he wrote—without yet having set foot in that land—as a candidate for the Chamber of Deputies, he praises the Kabyles, who inhabit the Atlas Mountains, as the real freedom-loving noble savages, far worthier of that appellation than the Caribs and other American Indians that Rousseau eulogized. In the Atlas "he would have found men subject to a sort of social police and nonetheless almost as free as the isolated individual who enjoys his savage independence in the heart of the woods; men who are neither rich nor poor, neither servants nor masters; who name their own leaders, and hardly notice that they have leaders." Yet the Kabyles' nobility does not soften their savagery: they love their freedom so much that should "you wish to visit them in their mountains, even if you came with the best intentions in the world, even if you had no aim but to speak about morality, civilization, fine arts, political economy, or philosophy, they would assuredly cut off your head." The coastal Arabs share the Kabyles' love of liberty: they place it "above all the pleasures and would sooner flee into the desert sands than vegetate under a master." Not so peremptorily inhospitable as the Kabyles, they nevertheless "love war, pomp, and tumult above all." Yet for all their ferocity, Tocqueville's Algerians are amenable to the benefits of European progress; they want what Europeans have so long as it doesn't threaten to take away what *they* have: their prized liberty. These half-civilized tribesmen already possess what Tocqueville considers the better half of civilization.

In his "Essay on Algeria" (1841), written after his first voyage there, Tocqueville condemns the savagery with which the French army is attempting to impose civilization on the Arabs: "we are now fighting far more barbarously than the Arabs themselves. For the present, it is on their side that one meets with civilization." In his "First Report on Algeria" (1847), written after his second trip, he deplores the colonial administration that has gutted the native system of charity-supported schooling in religion and law. "Muslim society in Africa was not uncivilized; it was merely a backward and imperfect civilization.... [W]e have made Muslim society much more miserable, more disordered, more ignorant, and more barbarous than it had been before knowing us." He advocates cultivating the best in Muslim civilization rather than razing it and erecting a European showpiece in its place:

> [W]e must demand of them things that suit their ways, and not those contrary to them. Individual property, industry, and sedentary dwelling are in no way contrary to the religion of Muhammad. Arabs know or have known these things elsewhere; they are known and appreciated by some in Algeria itself.... Islam is not absolutely impenetrable to enlightenment: it has often admitted certain sciences or certain arts into itself. Why do we not seek to make these flourish in our empire?

Among the native ways to be preserved is the Muslim faith. To try to eradicate it as a noxious superstition would only divert legitimate religious passions into politically incendiary channels, so that the maddest mullahs would dominate the scene. Although Tocqueville does not doubt for a moment that France should have an empire in Muslim lands, his moderation and delicacy seek to transform the bloody clash of civilizations into a relatively gentle reconciliation. No wonder Said has no place for him in his rogues' gallery of Oriental travelers.

### Sympathy and Disgust

ANOTHER ORIENTALIST WRITER WITH a moderate spirit and a delicate touch is Edward William Lane, author of *An Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* (1836; revised, 1860), translator of *The Thousand and One Nights*, and compiler of the *Arabic-English Lexicon*. Said typically faults him as overbearing, presumptuously encyclopedic, and unable to establish a human connection with his Egyptian subjects. But in fact Lane writes with an appealing sense of human comedy, which he finds abundant in Muslim piety; he presents it with the deft irony of the *philosophes* but without their scourging contempt. Of a friend's peculiar religious proclivity he composes an endearing vignette of holiness gone around the bend:

> He was then a member of the order of the Saadeeyeh darweeshes [dervishes], who are particularly famous for devouring live serpents; and he is said to have been one of the serpent eaters; but he did not confine himself to food so easily digested. One night, during a meeting of a party of darweeshes of his order, at which their Sheykh was present, my friend became affected with religious frenzy, seized a tall glass shade which surrounded a candle placed on the floor, and ate a large portion of it. The Sheykh and the other darweeshes, looking at him with astonishment, upbraided him with having broken the institutes of his order; since the eating of glass was not among the miracles which they were allowed to perform; and they immediately expelled him.

Several embarrassing relapses occur before his friend becomes a recovering vitrophage. The tale is a hoot, and Lane tells it without malice or disdain.

Yet the deadpan style serves not only Lane's gentle humor, but his asperity, too, as in the description of the Egyptian child's religious upbringing: "He receives also lessons of religious pride, and learns to hate the Christians, and all other sects but his own, as thoroughly as does the Muslim in advanced age." Of those whom the Muslim hates, Jews enjoy pride of place:

> Not long ago, they used often to be jostled in the streets of Cairo, and sometimes beaten merely for passing on the right hand of a Muslim. At present, they are less oppressed; but still they scarcely ever dare to utter a word of abuse when reviled or beaten unjustly by the mean-



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> est Arab or Turk; for many a Jew has been put to death upon a false and malicious accusation of uttering disrespectful words against the Kur-an or the Prophet. It is common to hear an Arab abuse his jaded ass, and, after applying to him various opprobrious epithets, end by calling the beast a Jew.

Lane's imperturbable reasonableness is the perfect instrument with which to slice unreason wide open and reveal how close the amusing lies to the appalling.

The American traveler John Lloyd Stephens, author of *Incidents of Travel in Egypt, Arabia Petraea, and the Holy Land* (1837)—and of even more celebrated books about his explorations in Yucatan and Central America—also wields a skeptical intelligence lightly in his encounters with Muslim superstition. Sound Yankee common sense and compassion are his measuring sticks, and he discovers a great deal on his journey that doesn't meet those specifications. After climbing Mount Sinai, he tells a Bedouin and an old Bulgarian monk that he remembers a traditional Muslim story in which Muhammad rides a camel to the mountaintop before ascending to the seventh heaven. Stephens had forgotten to look for the camel's footprint, which was supposedly preserved there on the rock. The blowhard monk spits all over the Muslim legend; everyone knows the camel had stumbled and broken Muhammad's neck before they got halfway up. The incensed Bedouin counters that the story is incontrovertible: it appears in the Koran, he himself has seen the footprint many times, and it is "visible only to the eyes of true believers." Abandoning all reason in their dispute, Christian and Muslim true believer become equally ridiculous to Stephens.

A little devotion goes a long way for the pragmatic Stephens:

> It was strange to be brought into such immediate contact with the disciples of fatalism. If we did not reach the point we were aiming at, God willed it; if it rained, God willed it; and I suppose that, if they had happened to lay their black hands upon my throat, and stripped me of everything I possessed, they would have piously raised their eyes to heaven, and cried, 'God wills it.'

Attributing all to the will of God renders human agency pathetically ineffectual, as Stephens demonstrates with an anecdote about two Turks who smoke casually after an earthquake, their safekeeping entrusted to Allah, before being crushed by falling rubble.

Stephens finds that the will of Allah and the honor of the Prophet provide a useful excuse for beastly behavior. In Hebron he notes the profound Muslim revulsion at the Jewish presence: the Jews "were removed from the Turkish quarter, as if the slightest contact with this once-favored people would contaminate the bigoted follower of the Prophet." Jewish hospitality pierces Stephens's heart, as he and a circle of pious Jews talk of "Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as of old and mutual friends." The Hebrew patriarchs are buried under the floor of the mosque in Hebron, and Jews and Christians are forbidden to pay their respects, as Stephens finds out when he tries to do just that. The particular Muslim hatred of Jews is, as we see, a leitmotif in the early 19th-century travel literature. The contention widespread today that such hatred is a European import, or a reaction to Zionism, is clearly a self-serving canard. Stephens finds much in his travels to offend him, and his composure is often strained to the breaking point.

In the notebooks and letters that record Gustave Flaubert's journey to Egypt in 1849-1850 (collected in the volume *Flaubert in Egypt*, edited by Francis Steegmuller), enlightened liberal good sense is joined to libertine brio. Flaubert gambols through Egypt as a sex tourist, and his sole pious obeisance is to the spirit of Voltaire, who is constantly at his right hand, though he withdraws discreetly when Flaubert visits the whorehouse. Travel on these terms, Flaubert remarks repeatedly, is the antidote for terminal boredom. And surely there is much to divert him; the satisfaction of every lewd impulse is readily available here. He becomes an exultant connoisseur of fleshly heat and texture. Upon leaving the bed of the celebrated courtesan Kuchuk Hanem, Flaubert roars, "I felt like a tiger."

The caterwauling of dervishes in rapture also has its appeal for the traveler:

> Just the evening before, we had been in a monastery of dervishes where we saw one fall into convulsions from shouting 'Allah!' These are very fine sights, which would have brought many a good laugh from M. de Voltaire. Imagine his remarks about the poor old human mind! About fanaticism! Superstition! None of it made me laugh in the slightest, and it is all too *absorbing* to be appalling. The most terrible thing is their music.

It is the preposterousness of the *human* mind, not the Muslim mind, that most bemuses Flaubert; like Voltaire, he has found fanaticism and superstition enough in Christendom just as in Islam. With Flaubert, as with Stephens, one sees the beginnings of a rare cul-

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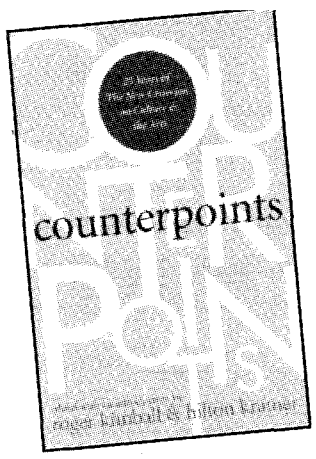


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tural clear-sightedness, in which the faults and oddities of Western civilization are as evident to the traveler's eye as those of the Muslim world; we will see this tendency grow more marked with subsequent travelers. Still, there is no shortage of Oriental bizarrerie to engage Flaubert's rapt disinterested regard, even if he is neither appalled nor amused, or at any rate says he is not.

### Humor and Hypocrisy

In The Innocents Abroad (1869), Mark Twain manages to be simultaneously amused and appalled, and by things that are mostly just appalling. When it comes to the sheer physical horror of a swarm of deformed beggars, he observes that Europe is no match for Asia:

> If you want dwarfs—I mean just a few dwarfs for a curiosity—go to Genoa. If you wish to buy them by the gross, for retail, go to Milan.... But if you would see the very heart and home of cripples and human monsters, both, go straight to Constantinople. A beggar in Naples who can show a foot which has all run into one horrible toe, with one shapeless nail on it, has a fortune—but such an exhibition as that would not provoke any notice in Constantinople. The man would starve.... O, wretched impostor! How could he stand against the three-legged woman, and the man with his eye in his cheek? How would he blush in presence of the man with fingers on his elbow?

Twain finds Levantine existence to be crippled and beggarly all around. In the Valley of Lebanon he remarks on the startling absence of technological advancement, the woeful persistence of pig-ignorance. "The plows these people use are simply a sharpened stick, such as Abraham plowed with, and they still winnow their wheat as he did—they pile it on the house-top, and then toss it by shovel-fulls into the air until the wind has blown all the chaff away. They never invent anything, never learn anything." The homeland of material misery and squalor is also the preserve of the stunted and twisted in morals: "Mosques are plenty, churches are plenty, graveyards are plenty, but morals and whiskey are scarce. The Koran does not permit Mohammedans to drink. Their natural instincts do not permit them to be moral. They say the Sultan has eight hundred wives. This almost amounts to bigamy. It makes our cheeks burn with shame to see such a thing permitted here in Turkey. We do not mind it so much in Salt Lake, however."

Twain finds more hypocrisy to skewer, even among the Christian gentlefolk of his own touring party, who desecrate a mosque by doing what tourists do:

> To step rudely upon the sacred praying mats, with booted feet—a thing not done by any Arab—was to inflict pain upon men who had not offended us in any way. Suppose a party of armed foreigners were to enter a village church in America and break ornaments from the altar railings for curiosities, and climb up and walk upon the Bible and the pulpit cushions? However, the cases are different. One is the profanation of a temple of our faith—the other only the profanation of a pagan one.

Yet Twain does not remain sanctimonious for long. In Jerusalem the sight of a legendary crusader's magic sword fills his head with entrancing mayhem: "I can never forget old Godfrey's sword, now. I tried it on a Muslim, and clove him in twain like a doughnut.... [I]f I had had a graveyard I would have destroyed all the infidels in Jerusalem." The varied tone of Twain's book—animadversions alternating with apologies, the baldest irreverence salved by grave decency—captures the American ambivalence toward the Muslim world that persists to this day: we cannot but think there is something strange and even horrible about it, but deep down it cannot be considered unreachably alien. Democratic compassion overcomes an equally natural antipathy for poverty, ignorance, superstition, and the sheer staggering repulsiveness of despots with 800 wives.

Sir Richard Francis Burton, the nonpareil linguist, irrepressible venturer into the world's least hospitable corners, inspired translator of *The Arabian Nights*, and author of *Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage to Al-Madinah and Meccah* (1855), enjoys a reputation as one of the travelers most sympathetic to the Muslim world. As an "amateur barbarian," and someone "thoroughly tired of 'progress' and 'civilisation,'" he posed as an Indian Muslim doctor and made the *hajj* to Mecca and Medina, cities forbidden to any Christian. He also said many flattering things about the Islamic world: the Muslims did better by their slaves than the Christians did by their poor freemen; critics of Muslim learning ought to consider how constricted and enervating a reasonable Muslim would find Trinity College or Christ Church; women were "a marketable commodity" in Western civilization as in Oriental barbarism; the harem is not a pit of evil, or even as nasty as some European family arrangements; the "origin of 'love' [could


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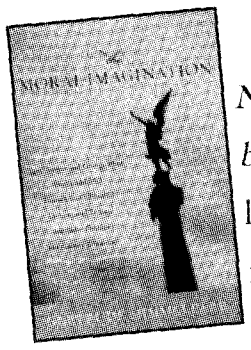


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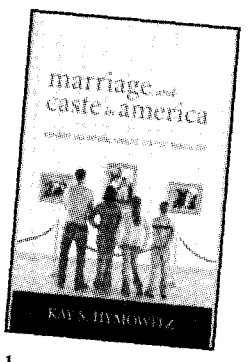


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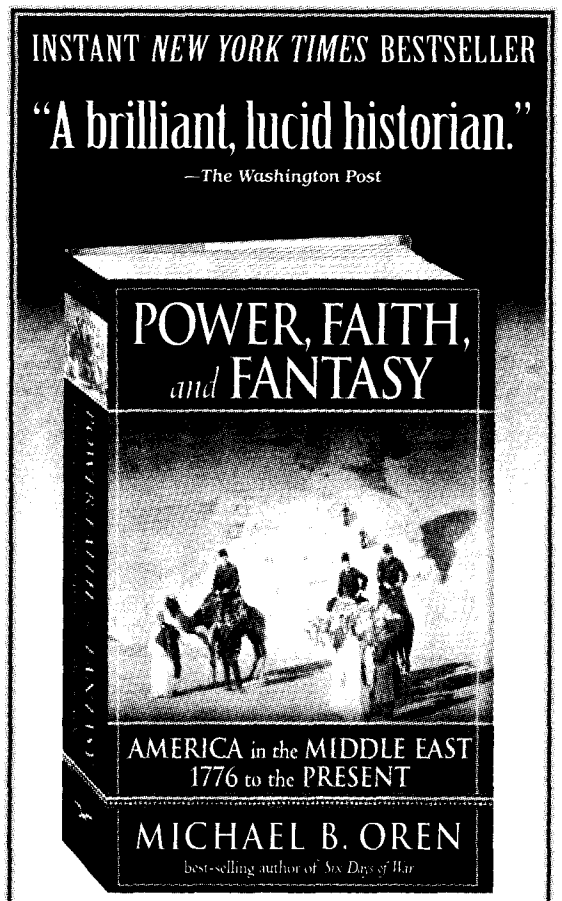


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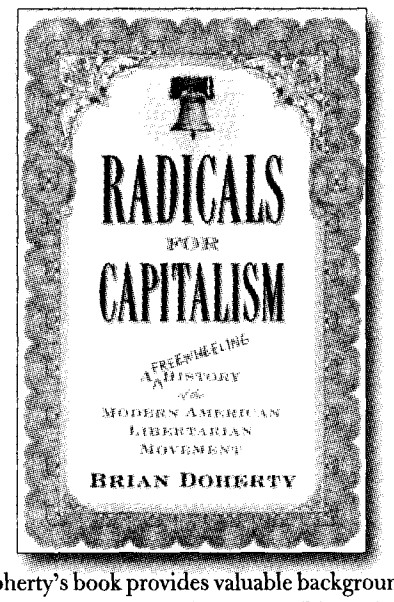


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be attributed] to the influence of the Arabs' poetry and chivalry upon European ideas rather than to medieval Christianity"; and the "Moslem may be more tolerant, more enlightened, more charitable, than many societies of self-styled Christians." Surely so generous an appraiser of Oriental virtues would not fit Said's stereotype of the Orientalist; yet Said assaults Burton as an imperialist agent beneath all the kind words.

He is not entirely wrong to do so. For it is also true that Burton's regard for the Orient extended only so far. He ultimately held European civilization not only superior, but fit to rule the East for its own good. He does not hesitate to call the outlandish aspects of the Muslim faith what they are, and the Islam he depicts is a civilization short on real wisdom. At Cairo's Islamic university, the renowned Al-Azhar, science is slighted and nonsense proliferates: "The natural sciences find but scant favour on the banks of the Nile. Astronomy is still astrology, geography a heap of names, and natural history a mass of fables. Alchemy, geomancy, and summoning of fiends are pet pursuits...." Hatred of the infidel, "the bad leaven of bigotry," is an indelible feature of Muslim teaching, especially in Egypt: "The same tongue which is employed in blessing Allah is, it is conceived, doing its work equally well in cursing Allah's enemies. Wherefore the Kafir is denounced by every sex, age, class, and condition, by the man of the world, as by the boy at school; and out of, as well as in, the Mosque." Burton, who finds so much to praise in Muslim civilization, finds just as much to detest in Muslim barbarism; and the lower is an inseparable part of the higher in this case.

The most famous, and the most notorious, description of the higher and lower Muslim natures conjoined comes in Charles M. Doughty's 1,200-page classic, *Travels in Arabia Deserta* (1888). Like Burton, Doughty was a prodigious linguist and a man of great daring; unlike Burton, he made his way into the depths of the Arabian desert without attempting to hide the fact that he was a Nasrany—a Nazarene, a Christian—whose very presence most Arabs regarded as "a calamity in their land." Doughty is quick to point out the calamities the Arabs bring upon themselves. He observes the deadly toll that the *hajj* exacts each year in the name of Muslim piety. (It still does.) "Infinite are the miseries of the Haj; religion is a promise of good things to come, to poor folk, and many among them are half destitute persons. This pain, the words of that fatal Arabian, professing himself to be the messenger of Ullah [Allah], have imposed upon ten thousands every year of afflicted mankind!" Muslim law also afflicts womankind, in his view, with the unavoidable injustice of the marriage arrangements: polygamy and divorce laws make women virtually disposable. Slavery, too, draws his particular reprobation; informing a righteous Muslim that there is no slavery in England, Doughty provokes his companion's embarrassment at "some flaws in their manners, some heathenish shadows in his religion where there was no spot in ours...."

Doughty pays the price for his boldness: he is beaten, robbed, imprisoned, and threatened with death, all for what one tormentor calls his "misreligion." "In what land, I thought, am I now arrived! and who are these that take me (because of Christ's sweet name!) for an enemy of mankind?" The true enemy, he cries, is the religion that is a "Chimaera of human self-love, malice, and fear!" When a friendly Arab advises him to avoid this tribulation by nominally converting to Islam, Doughty's Christian fatalism is as obdurate as the Muslim's usually is: "If it please God I will pass, whether they will or no." Doughty's pious nerve is a match for the viciousness of the Arabs: "'Dreadest thou not to die!'—'I have not so lived, Moslem, that I must fear to die!' The wretch regarded me! and I beheld again his hardly human visage: the cheeks were scotched with three gashes upon a side!" Doughty's encounter with the faith of "that fatal Arabian," and other near-fatal Arabians who swear by their Prophet's teaching, shows the clash of civilizations as a mortal danger, which must be met with high courage if one is to preserve his integrity, and his life.

### Going Native

T. E. LAWRENCE, LAWRENCE OF ARABIA, whom Winston Churchill extolled as the most chivalrous figure of the First World War, entertained the boldest hopes that the defeat of the Ottoman Empire would produce free Arab nations. In *Seven Pillars of Wisdom: A Triumph* (1926), Lawrence calls the struggle, in which he was the chief hero, an "Arab war waged and led by Arabs for an Arab aim in Arabia." But the war would not have taken place without his leadership. The book shows him instructing his Arab charges in the practice of civilized warfare, which requires a cool-headedness to overcome instinctive native heat. When one Arab, a Moroccan, kills another, an Ageyl, over nothing—"Hamed confessed that, he and Salem having had words, he had seen red and shot him suddenly"—Lawrence is faced with an uncontrollable blood feud if he lets the Ageyl retaliate.

> There were other Moroccans in our army; and to let the Ageyl kill one in feud



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> meant reprisals by which our unity would have been endangered. It must be a formal execution, and at last, desperately, I told Hamed that he must die for punishment, and laid the burden of his killing on myself. Perhaps they would count me not qualified for feud. At least no revenge could lie against my followers; for I was a stranger and kinless.

Cold rational justice must be enforced on a people who come all too readily to a boil, and Lawrence overcomes his own revulsion at the task of executioner in order to preserve the integrity of the fighting force. His description of the execution is terrible: Hamed crying and shrieking, Lawrence needing three shots to kill him, and trembling so violently that one of the bullets only breaks the victim's wrist. When it was over he had the men break camp in the middle of the night. "They had to lift me into the saddle," he confesses, suggesting that the civilizing mission weighs most heavily on the man doing the civilizing.

If he teaches his men justice, he also teaches them restraint. On their way to Aqaba, to strike a key strategic blow, the Arab army spies a Turkish column that would be easy pickings, at the cost of five or six men lost. Lawrence considers the loss unacceptable—they will need every man for the Aqaba assault—and calls the men off:

> I told Zael, who was not content; while the furious Howeitat threatened to run off downhill at the Turks, willy-nilly. They wanted a booty of mules; and I, particularly, did not, for it would have diverted us. Commonly, tribes went to war to gain honour and wealth. The three noble spoils were arms, riding animals, and clothes. If we took these two hundred mules, the proud men would throw up Akaba and drive them home by way of Azrak to their tents, to triumph before the women.

One of Lawrence's lieutenants must bludgeon into submission a young tribesman eager for spoil, but the lesson is learned: in civilized warfare, which rationally calculates means and ends, instant gratification must be foregone for a higher purpose. Lawrence teaches the men whom he leads, and whom he professes to serve, how to unite their disparate forces and conduct war not for blood-anger or trifling prizes, but for their freedom.

Yet freedom from the Turks was followed by submission to the British and French; guilt for his failure to secure Arab freedom nearly breaks Lawrence. For in the middle of his mission Lawrence learns that the imperial powers will not grant the Arabs nations of their own, and the front of "reeking fraudulence" he must maintain with his men festers in his soul. His double life all but does him in:

> In my case, the effort for these years to live in the dress of Arabs, and to imitate their mental foundation, quitted me of my English self, and let me look at the West and its conventions with new eyes: they destroyed it all for me. At the same time I could not sincerely take on the Arab skin: it was an affectation only.... Sometimes these selves would converse in the void; and then madness was very near, as I believe it would be near the man who could see things through the veils at once of two customs, two educations, two environments.

In *The Valleys of the Assassins* (1934), Freya Stark, whose *Times* (of London) obituary called her "the last of the Romantic Travellers," goes in quest of the heirs to the medieval Persian sect known as the Assassins, an offshoot of the Ismaili, a Shia branch famed for its learning. Not unexpectedly, she finds no worthy successors. What she does find is the imbecile inertia that seems standard in those parts. A friend refuses a doctor's help for his seriously ill daughter, who would be violated if a man were to see her; the girl of course dies. An opium-smoking doctor shrugs when she observes that his habit will kill him, showing the "melancholy fatalism which is all that the East promises to retain in the absence of religion." Asking for potatoes in a remote mountain village, she is told to go to the next village over, less than a mile off. "'They grow them there,' he added, 'but our village has never grown them. It is not our custom.'" In the mountains, where snow falls heavy in the winter, they have never "invented some means of locomotion like skis or snowshoes to break their prison." Necessity is the mother of resignation. The Ismaili enlightenment, snuffed out so long ago, shows no hope of revival in the land where they have no potatoes.

Like Stark, Robert Byron, author of *The Road to Oxiana* (1937), searches for a bygone Muslim epoch of light. In Afghanistan of all places, in the city of Herat, now "but a name and a ghost," there occurred the superb efflorescence of a Muslim civilization that truly knew how to live: the Timurid Renascence of the 15th century. "Strolling up the road towards the minarets, I feel as one might feel who has lighted on the lost books of Livy or an unknown Botticelli." There is nobility in Byron's Herat to make one weep. Of course, the flower of Islamic humanism is long wilted. An


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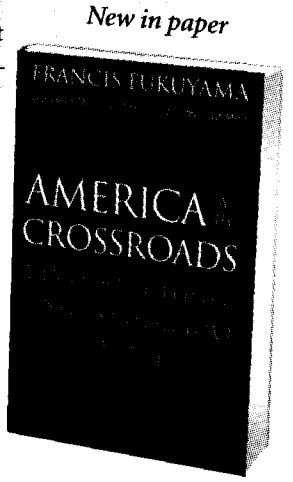


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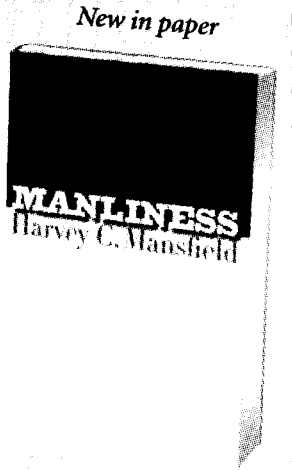


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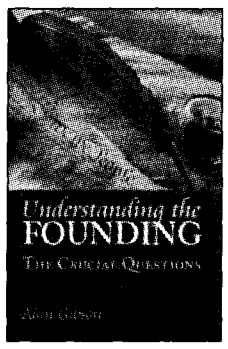


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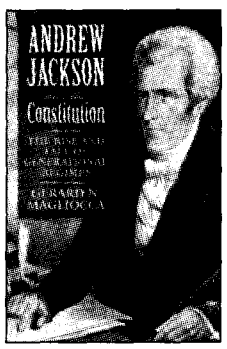


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Afghan consul in Persia tells Byron that Balkh is "a historical city, the *Home of the Aryan Race*." This fevered claim to what is supposedly the most illustrious heritage—an infection caught, Byron is sure, from Nazi Germany—relieves the ignominy of what these people actually are now. Byron caustically notes that until the prior year the Afghans professed themselves Jews, the lost tribes of Israel. "But nothing is too fantastic for Asiatic nationalism."

Wilfred Thesiger, the daring Englishman whose journeys through the preternaturally barren Empty Quarter of Arabia in 1945-1950 are recounted in *Arabian Sands* (1959), mourns the demise of the Bedouin way of life even as he honors its putative glory. The "Arabian Nightmare," the new world introduced by the oil prospectors of the Iraq Petroleum Company in 1950, essentially renders Bedouin life extinct. To lose their hard, nomadic, camel-breeding existence Thesiger considers a tragedy. "They were not ignorant savages; on the contrary, they were the lineal heirs of a very ancient civilization, who found within the framework of their society the personal freedom and self-discipline for which they craved." He idealizes the fierce manliness of the Bedu: "Among no other people have I felt the same sense of personal inferiority." In place of their noble freedom, Thesiger foresees their future as "a parasitic proletariat squatting among oil-fields in the fly-blown squalor of shanty towns in some of the most sterile country in the world." Said never mentions him.

Like T.E. Lawrence, Thesiger is a soul in need of exemplary privations and purifying dangers; unlike Lawrence, who tries to bring justice and restraint to the wild tribesmen, Thesiger goggles rapturously at their most flagrant barbarities. He tells an awful tale in which a Saar herdsman fired at a gang of camel rustlers and killed a teenaged boy; the next day the dead boy's father and his men come upon a 14-year-old Saar boy and stab him to death: "I pictured the scene with horrible distinctness. The small, long-haired figure, in white loin-cloth, crumpled on the ground, the spreading pool of blood, the avid clustering flies, the frantic wailing of the dark-clad women, the terrified children, the shrill insistent screaming of a small baby." Yet for all his imaginative insight, Thesiger readily excuses the revenge-murder: "Vindictive as this age-old law of a life for a life and a tooth for a tooth might be, I realized none the less that it alone prevented wholesale murder among a people who were subject to no outside authority, and who had little regard for human life; for no man lightly involves his whole family or tribe in a blood-feud." No legal authority to which to appeal, small regard for human life: these define not "a very ancient civilization" but the cruelest savagery. Thesiger's need to prove himself a man among men in this barbaric company is pathetic and deeply uncivilized. He *is* the Bedouins' inferior: they are merely brutes, he a cultivated man—an old Etonian and an Oxford graduate—playing at brutishness and failing to realize the seriousness of the game.

### Today's Clash of Civilizations

When Ryszard Kapuscinski, the late Polish author of *Shah of Shahs* (1982), goes among the brutes, he knows where he is and what he is doing: in Iran, the brutes are whoever happens to be in power at the time. Iran had intense 20th-century longings for civilization, and even suffered the birth-pangs more than once, but no decent regime ever came out alive. Shah Reza Khan, the strongman installed by the British in 1925, was so bent on Westernizing his country that he forbade the photographing of camels as "symbolically backward" beasts. But the shah's support for Hitler rubbed the Allies the wrong way, and in 1941 the British solicited his abdication in favor of his 22-year-old son, Mohamed Reza Pahlavi.

The new shah had a beautiful young wife who bathed in milk, and he wore elevator shoes, which his loyal subjects reverently kissed for the photographic record. Five times assassins tried to enforce instant regime change; determined to keep the throne, the shah instituted a terror regime under the Savak, the secret police. He justified his terror as necessary protection for his project of building a "Great Civilization" in Iran. In 1973, flush with oil money, he promised that in ten years Iranian living standards would equal Western Europe's. For some they soon did: a "petro-bourgeoisie," established by the shah's patronage, would have lunch flown in from Maxim's of Paris. For most the glorious future never arrived: in 1979, with the shah gone, Kapuscinski would watch a peasant woman mold cow dung into cakes of heating fuel for her home. Instead, the shah's fecklessness and viciousness made the mullahs look like the preferable choice. But no Great Civilization was to come from an Islamic revolution. Kapuscinski shuddered at the spectacle of a million people praying en masse in Tehran's great square. We know how right he was to shudder.

With V.S. Naipaul, the Orientalist wheel comes full circle, and antipathy for the Muslim past and present is as vivid as in Chateaubriand. Naipaul, the Trinidad-born novelist, travel writer, and Nobel laureate for literature, writes of post-revolutionary Iran in *Among the Believers: An Islamic Journey* (1981). He is unsparing in his loathing for the new regime. The revolutionary order is founded by men "without political doctrine, only with resentments." What he sees



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wherever he goes in Iran is rage, directed principally against all things Western and modern. A student informs him that "Islam was the only thing that made humans human"—in effect denying humanity to non-Muslims. Individuality is to be eradicated in the name of mass holiness: "Unity, union, the backs bowed in prayers that were like drills, the faith of one the faith of all, the faith of all flowing into the faith of one and becoming divine, personality and helplessness abolished: union, surrender, facelessness, heaven." The inclination to take humanity as it comes that makes Naipaul a novelist also makes him a relentless critic of true belief befogged by abstraction. "You want men to be perfect. That's the difference between us," he tells a fervent young Islamist in Malaysia, another of the countries he visits on his Islamic journey. The dream of earthly perfection based on Islamic principles is the mass delusion of foundering men in foundering societies. "If you know the Koran you know everything," a Malaysian commune dweller confidently tells Naipaul, and this wretched fundamentalism dooms any hope of genuine spiritual and material advancement.

The only hope Naipaul sees is in the adoption of modern ways. In *Beyond Belief: Islamic Excursions among the Converted Peoples* (1998), he allows just the glimmer of a possibility that religious barbarism might have proven so self-destructive that for some the despised universal civilization seems the only wise alternative. A member of the Malaysian Muslim youth movement whom he met in 1979 has by the late 1990s become the manager of a holding company and works in a skyscraper suite. "What they had been looking for religion to do for them in 1979," he observes, "simple power, simple authority, had done for them later." A highbrow philistine—to use that word without the usual pejorative intent—after the manner of James Mill and Macaulay, Naipaul permits himself a moment to celebrate Western commercial civilization as it transforms precincts of the Islamic world. If only the Islamic world were more willing to let itself be transformed.

## The Travelers' Truth

Someone who reads only Edward Said—and he is a sainted authority among leftist academics today—may come away convinced that his argument is true. But to read in the travel literature he disparages is to see how wrong he is. The travelers' tales do not originate in malevolent prejudice or issue in gross distortion; rather they are drawn from carefully observed reality. A great variety of writers see many different things; but more importantly, they see some of the same things over and over again, not because of the Orientalists' engrained turn of mind, but because those things are striking and significant and true. The travel literature overwhelmingly shows Islam recoiling from the Western touch, perhaps in part out of legitimate fear that it might be transformed into an alien shape with all the West's deformities, and to a great degree out of blind hatred inculcated over centuries of prejudice and ignorance. In any case, the Orientalists' writings testify to the deep roots of the modern Islamist fighting creed, in which Islamic purity must be preserved from Western, liberal, modernizing pollution.

Said writes with what he supposes is withering irony of the Orientalists' configuring Islam as the Other; but one cannot read these works without concluding that Islam, especially in its militant form, *is* the Other, not as the West's fantasy nemesis but in its own deeply graven traditions and chosen historical course. That does not mean accommodations cannot be reached by men of good will and moderate heart. Of the travelers, Chateaubriand is really alone in the depth of his loathing for Islam. Among the others, even those who are justly horrified by the barbarities they witness, a moderate and sensible spirit prevails, while some of the 20th-century travelers feel as much at home in Arabia or Afghanistan as in England. Such decent and thoughtful souls as Tocqueville, Twain, Lawrence, and even the querulous Naipaul, show how the breach between cultures might begin to be healed. But they and their fellow writers also show that the clash of civilizations is real, that certain aspects of it may be irreducible, and that the conflict will not be over any time soon.

*Algis Valinuas is a literary journalist and the author of* Churchill's Military Histories *(Rowman & Littlefield).*



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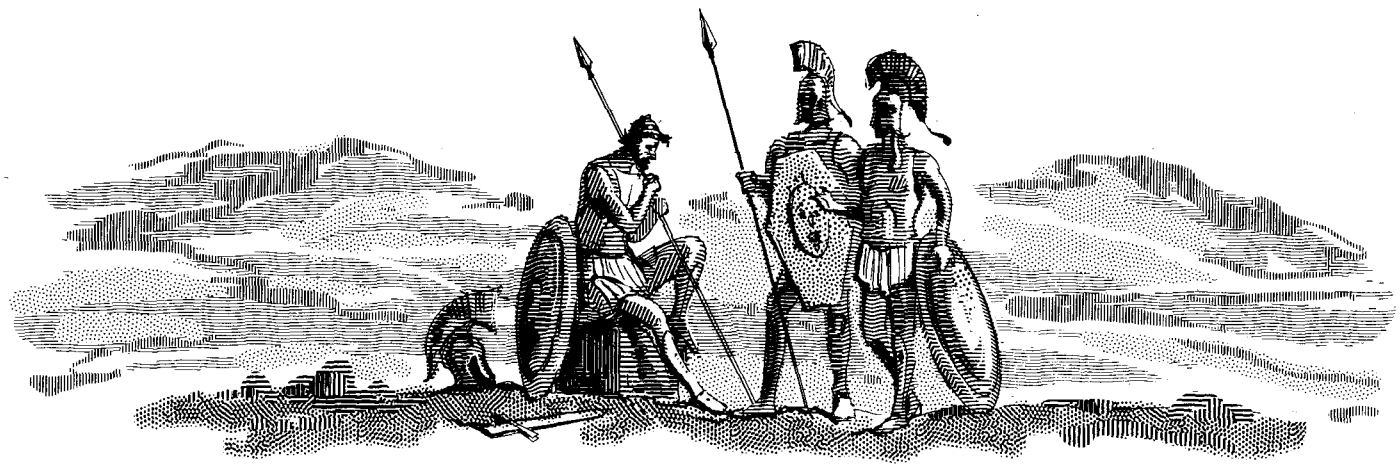
Book Review by Ronald Cluett

# Alexander in Afghanistan

*The Afghan Campaign: A Novel*, by Steven Pressfield.
Doubleday, 368 pages, $24.95



Alexander the Great ran one of the shrewdest media operations in history. His entourage included men whose job it was to chronicle his exploits, both for dissemination among his contemporaries and for posterity. While their works have not survived the passage of time, their influence has. Alexander is one of the select figures from classical antiquity who continues to excite the popular imagination, not just in the West but in Central Asia and India as well.

Spin control thus has an ancient pedigree. In antiquity as in the present, broadcasting a preferred interpretation of a leader's prowess involved the suppression of inconvenient perspectives, whether dissents from Alexander's strategic vision or the enormous suffering and sacrifice exacted by that vision's implementation. Each perspective—the strategic vision and the human toll—sheds light on Alexander's boldest gamble, the invasion of Afghanistan, which is the subject of Steven Pressfield's gripping fictional recreation in *The Afghan Campaign*.

Alexander's strategic rationale for conquering Persia had been clear, defensible, and popular: by leading a Greek army to victory in the heart of Persia, he would avenge the Persian defeat of the Greeks on Greek soil over a century earlier. Conquering Afghanistan, however, was another matter entirely. The rationale was never clearly or persuasively articulated, and whatever might have motivated him—his own further glorification, ambition to conquer any territory not yet subject to his rule, or insatiable curiosity about the peoples and places "at the edges of the world"—he failed to rally his increasingly polyglot troops to fight with the unwavering dedication they had displayed during the Persian campaign.

Moreover, those troops faced in Afghanistan conditions that would test invading armies for the next two millennia. The harsh mountainous terrain and brutal weather were only part of the challenge. The Afghans themselves were no less formidable than their environment. Riven by internal divisions and tribal loyalties, they nonetheless proved more than capable of rallying to resist the designs of a foreign invader. As a result, Alexander spent more time conquering Afghanistan than he did Persia, and with less to show for it: not only did Afghanistan offer no comparable symbolic and strategic victory, but constant revolts undermined whatever glory he could claim for his defeat of Spitamenes, his primary Afghan foe.

Pressfield's The Afghan Campaign is a vivid, compelling tale about the challenges of the war, as recounted by Matthias, a young Macedonian infantryman in Alexander's army. While Alexander himself makes important appearances and remains the charismatic leader for whom Matthias and his fellow soldiers are willing to die, the story focuses on the daily struggles of the footsoldier. Pressfield's training and skill as a screenwriter are evident in many superbly constructed, briskly paced, and dramatically engaging scenes. Matthias and his fellow soldiers never doubt Alexander's brilliance as a commander, despite his absence from much of the day-to-day fighting. The strategic purpose for which Alexander is fighting matters less to them than their service to Alexander himself. At the same time, Matthias had initially joined Alexander's army to follow a family tradition, to prove himself a man, and to see the world (while profiting personally in the process, he hopes). In this sense, Alexander's army is a vehicle for realizing personal ambitions. Alexander's leadership is thus both crucial to Matthias's story and ultimately of secondary importance to it.

While Matthias's direct contact with Alexander is infrequent, his encounters with the Afghan people, on and off the battlefield, are routine. These encounters raise the important question of how well we ever understand the enemy. Matthias would like to believe that he comes to understand the enemy quite well. Certainly, he comes to respect the tenacity of the foe he faces in battle. He forms a rough friendship with an Afghan porter, Ash, whose harsh treatment of women initially confounds and disturbs Matthias. More significantly, he falls in love with and marries an Afghan woman, Shinar. In doing so he both fulfills Alexander's policy of encouraging marriage between his troops and local women and incurs the wrath of Shinar's brothers, who seek to avenge the dishonor the marriage has brought on their family. But Matthias's exposure to Afghan life only deepens his perplexity, incomprehension,



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and sense of otherness. The more he learns, the more he realizes how little he knows, beyond the sometimes painful, sometimes happy, realization that he will always remain an alien in an alien land.

Such hard-won self-knowledge is one aspect of the central question that animates this story: how war tests and in the process transforms the individual. The tests are obvious: exhaustion, illness, hunger, suffering, death. The transformations are subtle, often unwelcome. Surviving extreme conditions against seemingly impossible odds can become a point of pride, particularly for a young man eager to assert his manhood to fellow soldiers. Finding love in such a setting can be even more unexpected than survival itself. At the same time, relentless exposure to violence numbs and alienates: the distance between witnessing the brutality of others and committing acts of brutality oneself, Matthias learns, often proves disturbingly short. And the decision he makes at the end of the novel raises perhaps the most profound question of all: after all that you have experienced, can you ever really go home?

His story, then, is an everyman's story—not only about Afghanistan in the early 320s B.C., but about men wherever they wage war. Unfortunately, *The Afghan Campaign* is least successful on this level. There are, for example, some jarring archaisms of dialogue and prose. Matthias and his "mates" get "varnished" on cheap booze, condemn "outrages" upon women, and begin conversations with "howsoever." They sound neither like 4th-century Macedonians nor 21st-century grunts. If anything, they have a Victorian cast that can make them sound like figures in a boy's adventure novel. However charming, such language confers upon them an air of innocence utterly out of keeping with the novel's insistence that war imposes a harrowing *loss* of innocence.

And yet it is this very possibility of retaining one's inner innocence while surrounded by horror that may explain the enormous popularity of Pressfield's work among the rank-and-file soldiers of the American military. Matthias holds out to the reader the promise that every soldier wants to believe: not only will you survive and grow in the crucible of the battlefield, you will emerge from it with your peacetime decency and goodness intact. No general, of course, has ever been able to deliver completely on such a promise, and no amount of spin control has ever successfully concealed the failure to do so—not even Alexander's.

*Ronald Cluett holds a Ph.D. in classics from Princeton University.*

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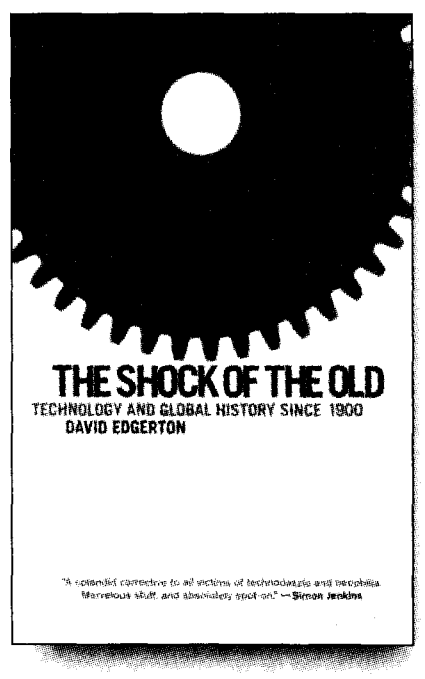


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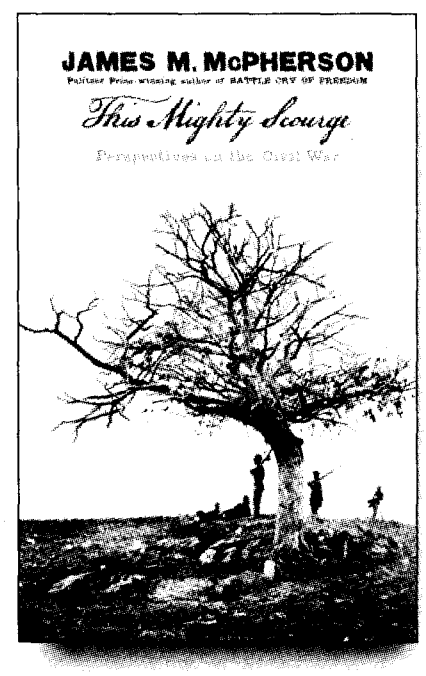


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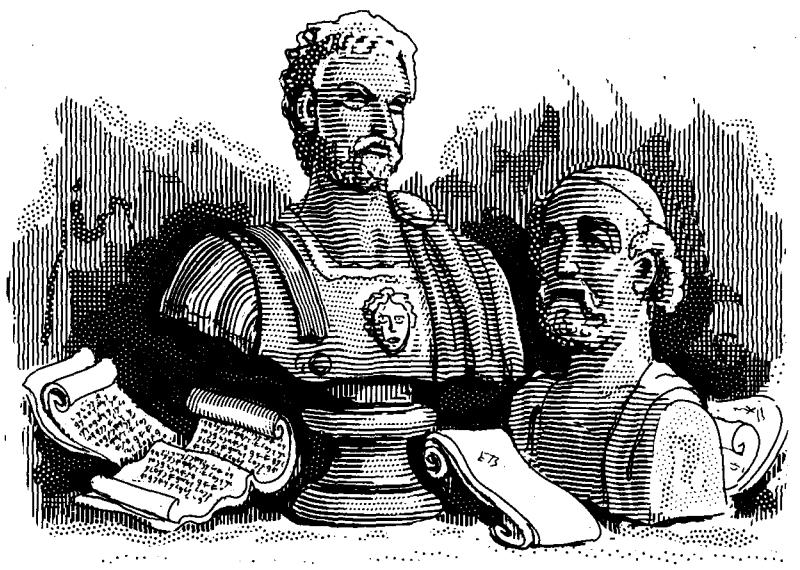
# From Polis to Imperium

*The Classical World: An Epic History from Homer to Hadrian*, by Robin Lane Fox.
Basic Books, 656 pages, $35



The subtitle of this book has it right: this is an *epic* history. At nearly 700 pages, it is lengthy but selective, structured around large themes, and distinguished by its vivid style. Like some of the best epics, it stops *in medias res*, leaving its audience to wonder what came next in the story and facing the challenge of figuring out what it all means.

*The Classical World* moves well as a narrative. Its 55 short, lively chapters proceed chronologically over nearly a millenium, from archaic Greece to the reign of emperor Hadrian, 117-138 A.D. But Robin Lane Fox, a historian at Oxford (who also consulted with Oliver Stone on his film *Alexander* and writes a gardening column for the *Financial Times*), has purposely not written a comprehensive survey with equal treatment of every era. Instead, he compresses history to concentrate on two periods that "have come to be seen as particularly classical": Athens of the 4th and 5th centuries, and the Rome of Julius Caesar and Augustus, from the 1st century B.C. to 14 A.D.

As an engaging conceit, Lane Fox periodically compares his views to what he imagines the emperor Hadrian would have thought about the same topics. The controversial emperor makes the perfect foil. He was deeply interested in the classical past, preferring, it seems, Greek antiquity to Roman. He was also an obsessive traveler, spending years traversing the provinces and visiting famous sites, while building a massive estate outside Rome whose many buildings and statues re-created memorable architecture and art from his far-flung expeditions. He reigned in the 2nd century after Christ, just when Christianity began to be institutionalized across the Roman world—the period that Edward Gibbon, in *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, described as the happiest in history. Although this era is long before the end of the Roman empire, it serves as the end of Lane Fox's *Classical World*.

His narrative emphasizes political and military events over culture. The latter shapes, but does not predetermine, historical change, which revolves around issues of freedom, justice, and luxury, the themes most prominent in the Greek and Roman writers on whom we rely for so much of our knowledge of the ancient world. In his telling, the people whose actions mattered most were aristocrats, and Lane Fox confidently rejects any contemporary approaches to history that shift the focus away from them. Nor does he hesitate to stand in judgment of events. For example, the "major event" of the early decades of the 4th century B.C. was the "renewal of *brutal* domination by the Spartans, to be followed by the *welcome* collapse of their main power-base" (my italics). These events culminated in the bloody failure of the Spartan drive for power and the subsequent political vacuum in Greece, which opened the way for the wars of the Macedonian conquerors Philip II and his son Alexander the Great and for consequent, far-reaching cultural changes. (It would be unjust, by the way, to allow the harsh criticism of Oliver Stone's movie to diminish Lane Fox's scholarly authority.)

Democratic Athens during the 400s and 300s B.C.—the Classical Age of Greece—marks the highpoint in his evaluation of the ancient world. He is refreshingly direct in arguing for this view. He acknowledges that today, in the Western world, Athenian democracy cannot receive full approbation because it was a government legally restricted to men, and, like every other Greek regime, slaveholding. Still, it represented a political and social innovation of miraculous dimensions, without precedent in a world of monarchy and oligarchy and given its form by a leader who belonged to one of Athens's most aristocratic families. Freedom was every citizen's birthright, justice was dispensed by democratic courts, and spending on luxuries was as prominent in public works as in private delights.

The meaning of "classical" is obviously crucial to his interpretation. The term, like "archaic," derives from art history, and expresses judgments formerly applied to the aesthetic qualities of art in different periods. To be ungenerous to those who formulated this usage, archaic implied something like "art not yet developed enough for our tastes," while classical designated "art as good as it gets, as defined by us." Lane Fox has his own stimulating, idiosyn-



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cratic view, which makes religious skepticism and freedom of speech, including obscenity, the signatures of the classical age. The change from archaic to classical came, according to him, when Pericles and other upper-class intellectuals rejected traditional religious views, especially the common belief that angered gods were the cause of the community's troubles and defeats. Aristophanes' raunchy, biting parodies of almost everyone were "the true symptom of a classical age." Thucydides was a master historian because he excluded divine causation in his history of the Peloponnesian War; his realist account, as a result, delivers "the most instructive war in human history." (How curious, then, that Thucydides' infamous Melian Dialogue, the most cold-blooded presentation of wartime Realpolitik in Greek literature, does not rate a mention.) Plato was "the greatest prose writer in all world literature." Athens, all in all, was "the nearest to an ideal state in the classical world."

IT IS MOSTLY DOWNHILL FROM ATHENS TO Rome. To be sure, Lane Fox recognizes the many accomplishments of the Roman republic's leaders and thinkers; he is especially insightful in explaining why Cicero deserves our admiration. Nonetheless, by fighting each other for primacy in the 1st century B.C., the republican aristocrats squandered what freedom, justice, and luxury they and their fellow citizens had accrued over centuries of successful conquest. The "ungentlemanly gentlemen's agreement" that Julius Caesar, Pompey, and Crassus forged in 59 B.C. destroyed the roots of freedom in the republic. (Lane Fox never calls this arrangement by its customary, if inaccurate, modern designation, the First Triumvirate.)

Caesar, victor in the civil war, failed utterly to solve the political crisis that had destroyed peace and order in republican Rome. Astoundingly, however, his grand-nephew Octavian—"the most dangerous eighteen-year-old in the world," Lane Fox calls him—found a solution by creating the system we call the Roman Empire and taking the title of Augustus ("the Venerable One") in the process. If Mark Antony had won the struggle instead of Octavian, the author speculates, the world might have been different (especially, in my opinion, because Cleopatra had an innovative political vision). As things turned out, however, peace returned at an unconscionably high price: Augustus controlled freedom, justice, and luxury, despite his claim to have restored the Republic. Lane Fox thus agrees with Tacitus, another one of his heroes, and with the iconoclastic Roman historian Ronald Syme (who, if ever there has been transmigration of souls, was the modern incarnation of Tacitus), in regarding Augustus as a despot who created a family dynasty that bought off the masses and the army, while securing everyone's loss of freedom. The architectural monuments that beautified the capital city were in truth "marks of subservience."

By the time of Augustus, the Roman world had reached a nadir of violence and disorder, to which the emperor provided a more potent antidote than freedom. The situation did not improve under the emperors who followed, and Hadrian's rule proved no exception. It is not a compliment when Lane Fox wryly identifies Hadrian's deification of his dead lover, the beautiful youth Antinous, as the "most positive religious policy of any Roman emperor." Worse still, Hadrian made his own bloody contribution to freedom's deterioration with his "final solution" for the Jews of Judea. (Lane Fox is never reluctant to use an over-the-top expression in place of a less striking, if perhaps more historically justified, one.)

His description of what he sees as a long, sad decline is absorbing in its elaborate detail, from Alexander naming a new city after his dog, to Pliny the Younger describing "resentment among some of the better-off of the 'bore' (*taedium*) of bringing up brats." As in all his books, he displays massive erudition. He has clearly absorbed more scholarship on ancient Greece and Rome than most ordinary mortals could hope even to skim. Yet the reasons he adduces for the decline are not always easy to discern amid the wealth of information. A clue to his interpretation lies in his decision to make Hadrian his "assumed reader." Despite his extensive education and undoubted learning, the emperor, we are told, was not a genuine intellectual but only a "man of taste." (Here, as countless other times in his text, Lane Fox is satisfied to encase a provocative label in quotations rather than explain what he means, which I think serious readers will find exasperating.) This seems to mean that Hadrian lacked the knowledge and insight to grasp the classical; he could not rise above "classicizing."

Classicizing, according to the author, is what characterizes the ancient Western world after Athens in its Golden Age; the term means ignorance and misunderstanding of the classical. Throughout the book, when Lane Fox imagines Hadrian's opinions about certain events or individuals, he makes it clear that he believes the emperor would not have been well-informed, or could not have analyzed the situation correctly, at least by contrast to a scholar today. I confess to qualms about this view. To say nothing of the intrinsic difficulty of putting ourselves inside the head of a Roman emperor, I think it could be an act of hubris (an error that scholars of antiquity should recognize better than anyone) to assume, even with the evidence of archaeology, anthropology, and other modern disciplines, that we are better positioned than Hadrian to understand the genuinely classical.

FOR ONE THING, I FEEL SURE THAT Hadrian would have understood an astonishing event that Lane Fox omits. Near the end of the 4th century B.C., the Athenian body politic voted unprecedented honors to Antigonus the One-Eyed and his son Demetrius, the Macedonian military commanders who removed the tyranny that had suppressed Athens's traditional democracy for nearly a generation. During this time, the traditional gods had failed to grant Athenians' prayers to restore their ancestral constitution. Since Antigonus and Demetrius did what the old divinities could not, it made sense for the Athenians, in a vote, to elevate these men to the rank of "savior gods." Historians today debate whether this deification was a genuine expression of religious gratitude, or merely insincere flattery, or a mixture of these and other motives. In any case, this amazing—and democratic—event marks the real beginning in Greek history of seeing a living human being as a god on earth who brings salvation. It therefore deserves a significant place when considering the Mediterranean background of the doctrines that energized early Christians. Was Athens still classical when its voters made gods of living men? Presumably not, by Lane Fox's criteria. How then should we classify it?

Lane Fox closes his epic with the allusive comment that "Christians...would then overturn [Hadrian's] world by antiquity's greatest realignment of freedom and justice...." Was there somehow an affinity in the nature of faith between non-classical but still pagan Athens, once the paragon of freedom, and the Christians of the early Roman empire? For me, that is the most fascinating of the big questions that this spirited book leaves open.

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Book Review by Jakub J. Grygiel

# Empire and its Discontents

*The Scandal of Empire: India and the Creation of Imperial Britain,*
by Nicholas B. Dirks. The Belknap Press, 416 pages, $27.95

*The Roman Predicament: How the Rules of International Order Create the Politics of Empire,*
by Harold James. Princeton University Press, 176 pages, $24.95

*Among Empires: American Ascendancy and Its Predecessors,*
by Charles S. Maier. Harvard University Press, 384 pages, $27.95

The rapid unfolding of dramatic events often leads to a lack of interest in the longer perspective. The 9/11 attacks, the projection of American power to Central Asia and Afghanistan, the quick armored war in Iraq, and the degeneration of the U.S. position there, all in hurried succession, have made it difficult for Americans to see the big picture. But precisely in such moments, we need to examine the situation with some detachment from, perhaps even coldness toward, the daily tragedies, and to rise above the details of policy. One way of doing so is to go back to history, mining it for lessons, warnings, and insights, though perhaps not policy solutions. The three books examined here, written by three historians, do exactly this: they look at the present *sub specie historiae*, in the laudable attempt to put the current strategic situation of the United States into a larger historical context.

Obviously, to look at the past with an eye to the present is also perilous inasmuch as history can be used to score political points. But the revival of interest in empires is welcome because no matter how we define American power, it is impressive in scope and size, and the challenges of managing it have historical parallels. Although the United States has exceptional characteristics, it would be foolish not to scour imperial history, both ancient and modern, for potential lessons.

Of the three books, the one by Nicholas Dirks, a professor of anthropology and history at Columbia University, is the most narrowly focused. And it is indignant. This is a book with a clear agenda, starting from a critique of the idea of empire from the perspective of the colonized ("critical colonial studies") and culminating in a condemnation of the West, from 18th-century Great Britain to 20th-century America, for its oppressive, power-hungry capitalism and imperialism (de facto synonyms in the book).

Dirks's core argument is that all empires are scandalous enterprises. In the case of Great Britain, imperial control over India had its origins in the corruption of the East India Company, a rogue quasi-state, organized and run for private profit. It effectively built its own state institutions in India, with all the trappings of power, from military force to a legal framework regulating its authority over Indian rulers, and as a result the company acquired enormous wealth for its agents and shareholders. When its corruption and violence grew to the point of endangering the political, legal, and economic well-being of Great Britain, the company was attacked, put on trial, and purged from the history of the empire.

The reckoning came by means of the late 18th-century impeachment trial of Warren Hastings, the first governor-general of British India, who was seen as responsible for the widespread profiteering and plundering. The main prosecutor was Edmund Burke, who in this book comes out as a worse offender than Hastings himself. The author accuses Burke of turning the scandal around, blaming the Indian rulers and the country's customs, and thus providing a lofty justification for further British rule over the subcontinent in the name, not of profit, but of the white man's burden. Through his great oratorical performances, Burke "laundered" imperial expansion, "exorcised" its past, made it a patriotic enterprise, and sanctioned more imperialist adventures by the British (as well as the West at large).

Dirks's history of the Hastings trial and the East India Company is fascinating, but his intent is hardly novel. He wants to send the reader to the dusty penitential corner where so many Western intellectuals spend an inordinate amount of time. He argues, *ex cathedra*, that the only way to judge actions is to consider how much they respect local values, customs, and laws. Burke's "mantle of universal morality," in Dirks's view, is simply a cover for his parochial defense of British rule of law. Though the great orator was committed to imperial reform, "we cannot forget which civilization he sought to serve." But not all empires have been Western, and not all empires have been equally scandalridden. Dirks has nothing to say about these cases. He does not even attempt to ground his own "universal morality" of respecting local customs, no matter how barbarous.

Princeton historian Harold James's book indulges neither "imperial nostalgia" nor imperial disdain. The book cover, portraying George W. Bush in Roman garb as a modern Caesar, is somewhat unfortunate inasmuch as James writes with care and nuance, rarely straying into sensationalism or political posturing.

The key question examined by James is what he calls the "Roman predicament," the challenge of maintaining international order through rules often perceived as arbitrary, or imperial, because they are formulated and enforced ultimately by someone's power. But these rules are also indispensable, because the alternative is chaos. The absence of imperial power is not peace, but all too frequently the opposite. To borrow James's language, Mercury, the god of commerce, requires Mars, the god of war.

Like Dirks, James is fascinated by late 18th-century British debates. He begins his book with a study of two British authors, Adam Smith and Edward Gibbon, whose *The Wealth of Nations* and *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* were published in 1776, a few years before the Hastings trial. Both point to the difficulty of maintaining an empire or, more broadly speaking, international order. Order is established by formulating and implementing a set of rules—rules that require some sort of power capable of enforcing them. But power provokes responses, often violent, against the established order, even if the rules are beneficial to all involved.

The alternative is to allow what James calls a "proliferation of values"; in Roman times, this took the form of polytheism, while in our times, it takes the form of multiculturalism. The problem with polytheism and multiculturalism, however, is that both involve "the suspension of a particular human faculty, that of



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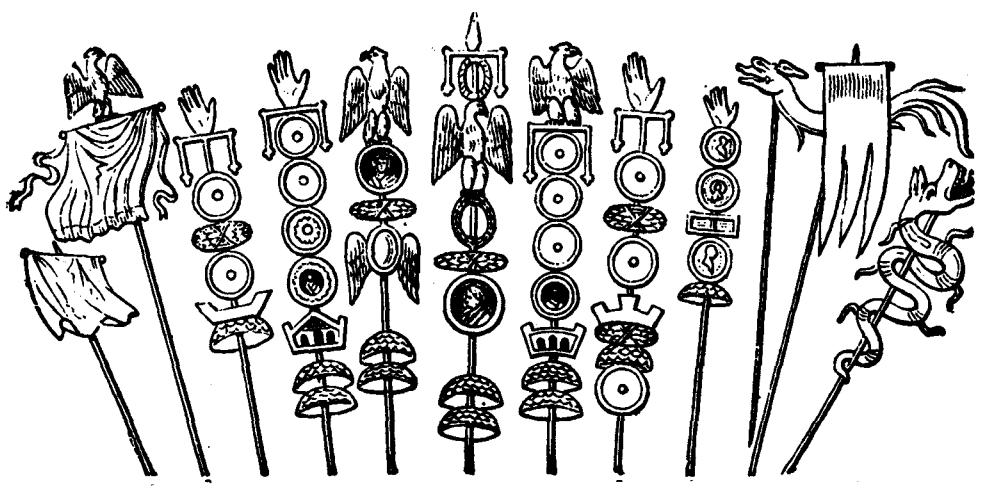
judgment"—without which the international order tends to decay and disintegrate. James's argument—suggesting the need for exercising judgment on the basis of some common standard—moves in a profoundly different direction from Dirks's.

Is there a way out of the Roman predicament? Can we have Mercury without Mars, order without violence? James does not offer specific policy prescriptions, and in fact argues that the answer lies beyond the mere management of interests and power. As he explains in his conclusion: "Our debate must avoid the non-value-based escapism of simply technocratic solutions, and it needs to concern itself with fundamental values." Ultimately, James would have us return to a dialogue based on something like shared natural law, and he thinks the conditions may be developing to make possible such a return.



Such a return, in the author's view, is not inconceivable. For instance, the rapid unraveling after 9/11 of the European project of multiculturalism, the realization among Europe's secular intellectuals that modern rationalism alone cannot defend Western values, and an emerging cross-religious dialogue—all these developments seem to indicate that we may be entering a post-multiculturalist era. The question remains, however, whether such a dialogue is likely to occur not just within Europe but between Europe and other regions. The Catholic theologian Joseph Ratzinger (now Pope Benedict XVI), as James notes, may find common ground with the liberal philosopher Jürgen Habermas. But will either be able to find common ground with Islamic intellectuals and Islamic religious leaders? So although James's erudite book provides the reader with a glimmer of hope, this is not an optimistic book. The Roman predicament—the need to have imperial power in order to enjoy a modicum of order—may, after all, remain a historical constant.

THIS HISTORICAL CONTINUITY IN EMPIRES is the subject of Charles Maier's *Among Empires*. The author, a professor of history at Harvard, accepts the starting point of the previous two books, that American ascendancy has historical parallels. The first part of the book is a remarkable comparative analysis of several empires, from Rome to Great Britain, and their challenges. It begins with perhaps the most basic issue: what exactly is an empire? Maier describes several aspects of imperial rule, from the use of violence to conquer and control to the establishment of new transnational elites, but prudently avoids a one-line definition. He does well by simply listing and analyzing various features of this "recurrent structure" in international relations, as if there were no such thing as the idea of empire, but only different empires. Some empires "are bloody-minded associations for conquest and exploitation; others settle into patterns of inertia that frustrate fanaticism."

What unites all empires is a similar set of problems. The challenge of imperial administration is particularly acute on the frontiers, which is where the action is, and where the fate of empires tends to be determined. One of the crucial strategic issues for empires is to figure out where to draw the line separating them from their adversaries, and how to sustain it. If frontiers are managed well, the empire is stable and generates trust; if frontiers are under assault, the whole edifice of the empire, and not just the periphery, is at risk.

Maier convincingly argues that in the 1990s the United States may have thought of itself as a post-territorial entity, not limited by boundaries and detached from territorial concerns, managing and benefiting from a global system of free transactions. But this utopian bubble burst on 9/11. "The logic of territory reasserts itself," he explains, and frontiers, whether in the Middle East or within European societies, become again zones of violence and blood. Frontiers now become even more crucial because they define the regions marked by the imperial peace, as distinguished from the zone that remains unaffected by it. History is in fact coming back, and with a vengeance.

The second part of Maier's book focuses on America's role in the world post-1945. He argues that the U.S. has been steadily shifting from an empire of production, exporting the American economic model, to being an empire of consumption. The U.S. relies on the periphery (Japan, China, and others) to finance American expenses. Maier's treatment of this subject is disappointing, often meandering between vague discussions of political economy and assertions about empire. He does not even take a consistent position on whether the U.S. is, or is becoming, an empire. There are real dangers associated with the slide toward empire, from the growth of the executive to the rise of new elites. But empire is also attractive, Maier declares, because it permits things like interventions to defend democracies and human rights. Despite ambiguities, however, Maier has written a highly intelligent book that avoids the pitfalls of much of the literature on empires.

THE THREE BOOKS UNDER REVIEW ARE quite different in scope, subject matter, and perspective, but they do agree on one crucial point: empires are not anachronistic political forms but will continue to appear in the political life of mankind. Recognizing this helps us to take a more realistic view of the world. Conflict is here to stay, and imperial power may be indispensable to our survival.

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Book Review by Bruce S. Thornton

# Cultivated Taste

*The Georgics of Virgil: Bilingual Edition*, translated by David Ferry.
Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 224 pages, $14 (paper)

*Virgil's Georgics*, translated by Janet Lembke.
Yale University Press, 144 pages, $24 (cloth), $15 (paper)

"The best poem of the best poet," said John Dryden of Virgil's *Georgics*. Montaigne praised the Roman poet's four books on farming as "the most accomplished work of poetry." Such estimations would strike even literate people today as hyperbolic or puzzling, given the obscurity of Virgil's masterpiece and its seemingly tedious subject matter. The conceit of plain poetic speech popularized by the Romantics, the ignorance of farming and country life typical of most moderns, and the decline in knowledge of classical literature all leave most people, even the tiny minority of poetry readers, incapable of appreciating the brilliance of the *Georgics* and its place in Greco-Roman and European literature. We live in a much different world from the one in which William Pitt, orating against slavery in the House of Commons, quoted from the first *Georgic*—in Latin.

The reduction of the *Georgics* to a literary curiosity is a shame. Virgil's themes, hardly limited to agriculture, address themselves to the timeless concerns of civilization, politics, and the human condition. And he writes with a virtuosity of poetic craftsmanship rare in any age, but especially so these days, when poetry has been reduced to virtual prose obsessed with private sensibilities, or postmodern word-puzzles destined to be deciphered by graduate students. The *Georgics*' fulfillment of what Virgil's colleague Horace deemed poetry's duty to "delight" and "instruct" explains the high opinion the poem enjoyed from the Renaissance down to the early 19th century. Despite that long eminence, however, the *Georgics* could not "survive the disruption of leisured elegance by the *Sturm und Drang*, the French Revolution, the Industrial Revolution and the Romantic Movement," as L.P. Wilkinson puts it in the introduction to his own excellent translation of the *Georgics*.

To translate the *Georgics*, we will see, is a difficult task, and we should be grateful to have two new versions. Janet Lembke and David Ferry are both veteran translators, though Ferry has more experience with Latin. Lembke writes about the natural world and has previously translated Aeschylus's *Persians* and *The Suppliants* and Euripides' *Electra* and *Hecuba*. Ferry is a poet who has translated *Gilgamesh*. His *Georgics* joins his earlier successes in translating Virgil's *Eclogues* and Horace's *Odes* and *Epistles*. Taken just as translations, both Lembke and Ferry have served Virgil well. Both communicate with fluidity and grace most of the literal meaning of the poem and much of its poetry, which is no small thing in a translation.

Virgil's seamless melding of poetic craft with complex philosophical ideas accounts for the difficulty a reader experiences in using any translation. Poetic artistry is always difficult to duplicate in another language, but Virgil's is particularly intricate and sophisticated. He reportedly spent seven years writing these verses, and presented them to Octavian himself in 29 B.C. Like all the great poets of the late Roman Republic, the so-called neoterics, Virgil was influenced by Hellenistic Greek aesthetic canons that put a high value on "learning" and "polish," the display of craftsmanship through a sophisticated interplay of meter, allusion, literary references, wordplay, imagery, and sound. For example, line 8 of the first *Georgic* celebrates the agricultural deities by whose generosity (in Ferry's translation)

*Chaoniam pingui glandem mutavit arista.*

The earth exchanged the acorns fallen
from oak trees
for ripening ears of grain.

Virgil assumes his reader will know that eating acorns is a motif of the golden age—that time before agriculture and technology first described by the Greek poet Hesiod. Thus he introduces here one of his major themes, that humans are humans because of arts like agriculture, the application of skill and thought to the raw material of a nature indifferent to human survival. Virgil strengthens the reference to the golden age by making this line syntactically a "golden line," a hexameter comprising two nouns, two adjectives, and a verb, a typical display of polish for Roman neoteric poets. Finally, the adjective "Chaonian" refers to Dodona, a Greek city that had an oracle to Zeus. Virgil delicately suggests that just as the golden age of Saturn must give way to Jupiter's iron age of work for mankind to reach its full potential, so too must Greece (and Greek literature) yield to Rome, a theme he elaborates in the *Aeneid*.

Or consider the multi-layered effect of Virgil's adjective *improbus* in these (once) famous lines:

*labor omnia vicit*
*improbus, et duris urgens in rebus egestas*

and everything
was toil, relentless toil, urged on by need
(Ferry)

Relentless work conquered
all difficulties—work and urgent need
when times were hard
(Lembke)

Most translators, like Ferry and Lembke, go with "relentless." This choice, while a good one, necessarily misses other, more negative meanings in Latin: "shameless," "immoderate," "flagrant," even "greedy." Such connotations suggest that the need to survive is indifferent to the more refined protocols of civilization. And let's not forget the sly reference Virgil makes here to his own earlier tenth *Eclogue*, in which a lovesick poet says *omnia vincit Amor*, "Love conquers all things." The self-reference is illuminating, for the need to control passion, and the destructive consequences of failing to do so, are one of the *Georgics*'s major themes.

As for the philosophical ideas, they are among man's weightiest: the possibilities of creating cultural and political order, indeed human identity itself, in a world riven by the forces of nature and the fierce passions of men. This process often exacts a tragic cost, and depends on the willingness of men to labor grimly and violently at checking the chaos inherent in themselves and



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in the cosmos. Virgil's characteristic genius can be seen in the way the *Georgics*, like his later masterpiece the *Aeneid*, raise these problems and examine them from numerous perspectives, at times optimistic about the possibilities of civilized order, at other times philosophical about this order's necessary transience.

Despite the manifest difficulty, both translators, as I say, serve Virgil well. Ferry seems more frequently to find effects in English that capture Virgil's artistry. For example, in his description of water running in a ditch Virgil uses the marvelous phrase *"raucum murmur,"* the vowels and the "m's" suggesting the sound of the water, an effect Ferry duplicates with his "muttering guttural sound of the water." This is much more effective than Lembke's "hoarse white noise," particularly since "white noise" has connotations in English inappropriate for describing water in a pre-modern ditch. But there's not much to criticize in either translation.

Success at translating an intellectually and poetically sophisticated poem like the *Georgics* depends on how well the general reader is helped not only to appreciate Virgil's artistry, but also to understand his ideas. This means that a thorough introduction, along with copious notes, should accompany the translation so that the reader is "instructed" as well as "delighted." In this regard, both editions leave much to be desired. They do cover the usual biographical and historical issues, though Lembke is better at discussing the influence of Hellenistic poetry on Virgil's craft, and the importance of the Epicurean didactic poet Lucretius on Virgil's poetics and themes. Ferry directs the reader to Richard F. Thomas's excellent Cambridge University Press commentary for more information on these matters, but readers would have benefited in both introductions from a more detailed discussion of Virgil's poetics. Particularly glaring is the failure to address the structure and characteristics of the epyllion in Book 4, the story of how the mythic agricultural hero Aristaeus lost and recovered his bees. More than a "mini-epic," as Lembke's note has it, the epyllion was the genre in which the protocols of neoteric poetics were most on display, and discussing this genre would have provided an opportunity to illustrate Virgil's poetic principles. Moreover, the relationship of this story to the rest of the *Georgics* is a continuing critical problem, which itself testifies to the poet's sophisticated architectonics.

When it comes to the ideas at the heart of the poem, Lembke is positively misleading, and Ferry, while correctly identifying the work's theme, does not elaborate enough to help the reader understand Virgil's larger meaning. Lembke makes several statements that muddle Virgil's theme. For example, when she writes that Virgil "passionately advocated caring without cease for the land and for the crops and animals it sustained," and that his message is that "only at our gravest peril do we fail to husband the resources on which our lives depend," she makes Virgil sound like a modern romantic environmentalist eager to restore a lost harmony with nature. This obscures something the *Georgics* clearly asserts, that the human relationship with nature is necessarily exploitive and violent—a point Virgil emphasizes by repeatedly comparing farming to war and the farmer's implements to the weapons of war. Nature is brutally indifferent to human flourishing, and only our uniquely human, crafty minds, and virtues like self-control and hard work, allow us to survive. Any beauty and order in nature, apart from the divine celestial bodies, is the consequence of human alteration and skill, as in the Italian farms and towns Virgil famously celebrates in Book 2. In fact, the *Georgics* offer a corrective to many of our own ecological delusions, in which we idealize nature and demonize civilization.

Lembke comes closer to the mark when she says that "an underlying thesis of the *Georgics* is that agriculture is the underpinning of civilization and the existence of civil communities." Yet she doesn't go on and elaborate this point and its significance for Virgil's political philosophy, but instead veers off into a confusing discussion of the golden age myth Virgil so brilliantly manipulates in the *Georgics*. She seems to miss Virgil's intent altogether when she writes: "In his nostalgia for the lost golden age, Virgil shows an intuitive grasp of the havoc wrought in human life by urbanization and warfare." Virgil indulges no such nostalgia for the golden age, a time when humans lived little better than animals feeding dumbly off the earth. That's why Jupiter ended the golden age, *nec torpere gravi passus sua regna veterno*: "Forbidding the world he rules to slumber in ease" (Ferry). Humans in the golden age are only potentially human; they require a harsh world to sharpen their wits and so realize their full potential, which, as Socrates says in the *Phaedrus*, can happen only in cities with sophisticated culture. But the tragic cost of this development includes suffering and hardship, death and disorder; the price we have to pay for human grandeur.

Ferry gets closer to this important theme when he writes that the *Georgics* celebrate "human accomplishment in the difficult circumstances of the way things are" and notes the pride the poem takes in humanity's "precarious successes." He is also better at identifying the correspondence between nature's destructive forces and those of human nature, a point Virgil makes by describing nature in human terms and vice versa, as in the description in Book 3 of the two bulls fighting over a cow:

> *dulcibus illa quidem inlecebris, et saepe superbos*
> *cornibus inter se subigit decernere amantis.*
>
> And she, with her sweet allurements...
> excites two ardent suitors
> to fight it out in battle with their horns.
> (Ferry)

The personification of the bulls in a phrase like *superbos amantis* (literally, "proud lovers") suggests the eternal human conflict sown by sexual passion, the confluence of violence and sexuality, which Virgil himself will explore through Dido and Lavinia in the *Aeneid*. And Book 4's discussion of bees is rife with implications for human society and political virtue, as well as civic disorder and war. But we need much more discussion of these ideas, and the explanatory notes need to be more thorough, if the reader is to take from the poem the philosophical riches it contains.

A didactic poem like the *Georgics*, taking up as it does serious philosophical ideas while lacking an accessible story and characters, cannot reach a modern reader on the basis of a translation alone, no matter how faithful or beautiful. I suppose we should be grateful that publishers will spend the money on new translations of one of the West's most spectacular poetic achievements, and both translators deserve praise for their work. But their publishers should be chastised for failing to ensure that these new translations were attended by adequate introductions and notes, so that readers might experience the full brilliance of Virgil's poem—and the translators' achievement.

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Essay by Douglas A. Jeffrey

# Larry McMurtry and the American West

Entering his eighth decade, Larry McMurtry has under his belt 29 novels, five collections of essays, several screenplays, and, recently, a few short histories, not to mention his vast journalistic output. Raised up in a ranching family near Archer City, Texas, he has become one of his generation's more prolific men of letters. A bibliophile at his core and a rare book dealer on the side, his knowledge, interests, and the topics and settings of his books range widely. But from the beginning of his career, the American West has been the theme and the place to which he has most often repaired. And he is of two minds about it.

In *Walter Benjamin at the Dairy Queen: Reflections at Sixty and Beyond* (1999), McMurtry lamented that his Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, *Lonesome Dove* (1985), a saga of two legendary retired Texas Rangers, had failed in its purpose. He had intended the book to "demythicize" the West. "[I]nstead," he complained, it "became a kind of American Arthuriad." In later (and lesser) novels, McMurtry tells us, he "tried to subvert the Western myth with irony and parody with no better results." He persists in this quest down to his latest novel, *Telegraph Days* (2006) and his latest history, *Oh What a Slaughter: Massacres in the American West, 1846-1890* (2005). Yet somehow his writings on the West nearly always subvert his subversive intentions.

*Telegraph Days* is the story of a bright and sassy woman with the Dickensian name of Nellie Courtright (she finds herself courted by, among others, George Armstrong Custer, Wild Bill Hickok, Buffalo Bill Cody, and Virgil Earp), narrated in the first person. It opens in the Oklahoma territory, in and around a desolate town called Rita Blanca, and ends on a Hollywood movie set that perfectly reproduces the town (though appearing now more charming than desolate) from old photographs. The disjunction between town and movie set, and between Nellie's life and the plot of the film—in which she will be played by Lillian Gish—is the novel's theme, and this disjunction between the reality of the past and how it is remembered, artistically and popularly, is the theme of most of McMurtry's recent books.

*Telegraph Days*—like McMurtry's earlier *The Colonel and Little Missie: Buffalo Bill, Annie Oakley and the Beginnings of Superstardom in America* (2005)—depicts William Cody as the capitalist inventor of this lucrative deception. Nellie writes:

> Lots of people live in the past, but Bill Cody seemed to be one of the rare few who lived in the future.... The Rita Blanca I was standing in, getting grit in my teeth, wasn't the Old West to me—it was the only west available. But Bill Cody was sincere, and calm as a banker. He was looking ahead to a day when our ordinary day-to-day lives on the prairie would be—what's the word?—picturesque, like the knights and ladies in King Arthur, or the novels of Walter Scott.

"As soon as something's ended," Cody tells her, "people will start flocking to get at least a glimpse of what it was like before it was over.... It's human nature." Nellie replies: "I'm a human, and it's not my nature." Then she adds: "Even as I said it I knew that my remark was partly a lie. Why read Walter Scott if not to catch a glimpse of what life was like in older times—times that were surely gone forever?"

Here in a nutshell are the two main questions of fact raised in McMurtry's books on the American West: What was it really like? and what of it remains, if any?

## Failure or Triumph

Oh what a slaughter deals primarily with six incidents, from the little-known Sacramento River Massacre in 1846 to the better-known Wounded Knee Massacre in 1890. Five were perpetrated by whites on Indians, one—the Mountain Meadow Massacre of 1857—by whites (with a few enlisted Indians) on whites. Secondarily, the book considers two military engagements in which Indians slaughtered white soldiers—the Fetterman Battle in 1866 and the Battle of Little Big Horn a decade later. These too qualify as massacres by McMurtry's graphic definition:

> The vocabulary of atrocity has always been rather limited.... You can burn a body, hack it up, decapitate it, cut off—or out—its genitalia, smash its skull, tear fetuses out of pregnant women, shoot arrows or bullets into it, maybe rip out its heart or other organs; and, really, that is more or less the whole menu.



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Although whites were pikers compared to Indians when it came to the art of reducing a human community to a "meat shop," each of these incidents was—in Kit Carson's description of the Sacramento River Massacre—"a perfect butchery." But McMurtry doesn't wallow. He is at pains to point out that the American West's chapter in the age-old history of massacres is relatively minor, given the relatively small numbers involved. And more than the horror of massacres, he is interested in what he calls their context. Wounded Knee, for example, was likely impulsive, triggered by an accidental gunshot; in the most chronicled of the six—at Sand Creek in Colorado in 1864—whites were bedeviled by a confusion between hostile and peace Indians (poignantly, Chief Black Kettle frantically waved an American flag as his camp was attacked). Both here and in his short biography *Crazy Horse* (1999), McMurtry points out that whites vastly overestimated the extent to which Indians were organized politically—and thus the extent to which the chiefs with whom they negotiated controlled their younger warriors. Indians, for their part (with exceptions like Red Cloud, a chief who visited Washington, D.C., and immediately began counseling peace), vastly underestimated the number and power of the whites. But the main contextual element in the West, according to McMurtry, was apprehension:

> [D]eep, constant *apprehension*, which neither the pioneers nor the Indians escaped, has, it seems to me, been too seldom factored in by historians of the settlement era, though certainly it saturates the diary literature of the pioneers, particularly the diary literature produced by frontier women, who were, of course, the likeliest candidates for rapine and kidnapping.

It is common sense that context is essential to understanding history. But common sense is generally lacking in the modern historical school and virtually nonexistent in recent scholarship on the West. For making sensible observations—e.g., that although "it is plain to us now, reflecting in tranquility, that the Indians had no chance, that was a fact scarcely evident to the first white settlers who faced them, many of whom were obliterated before they could erect even a first crude cabin"—McMurtry has sometimes found himself at odds with his professional brethren.

In a 1990 article in the *New Republic*, McMurtry characterized Western revisionism as "Failure Studies," in which "[o]ld, brutal, masculine American confidence" is replaced by "new, open, feminine American self-doubt." Revisionists, he wrote, portray America's western expansion as "an irresponsible white male's adventure, hugely destructive of the land itself, of the native peoples, and even of the white male's own women and children." There are two problems with this view, he argued. First, the revisionists are not, as they suppose, the first to notice "how violent, how terrible, and how hard winning the West actually was." His own reading of Western history, McMurtry wrote,

> as well as my boyhood among the old-timers, leads me to exactly the opposite conclusion: everyone noticed how hard it was.

**Books by Larry McMurtry discussed in this essay:**

*Horseman, Pass By*. Harper, 179 pages, 1961

*In a Narrow Grave: Essays on Texas*. Encino Press, 177 pages, 1968

*Lonesome Dove: A Novel*. Simon & Schuster, 843 pages, 1985

*Crazy Horse*. Viking Books, 148 pages, 1999

*Walter Benjamin at the Dairy Queen: Reflections at Sixty and Beyond*. Simon & Schuster, 204 pages, 1999

*Roads: Driving America's Great Highways*. Simon & Schuster, 206 pages, 2000

*The Colonel and Little Missie: Buffalo Bill, Annie Oakley and the Beginnings of Superstardom in America*. Simon & Schuster, 245 pages, 2005

*Oh What a Slaughter: Massacres in the American West, 1846-1890*. Simon & Schuster, 178 pages, 2005

*Telegraph Days: A Novel*. Simon & Schuster, 289 pages, 2006

> Even the young males, of several races, who were the ones most disposed to see it all as a grand adventure and a perpetual frolic, have copiously noted how quickly and how completely the fun could drain out of it.

Thus *Telegraph Days* begins with Nellie's father hanging himself in a barn, an event which she and her last remaining brother had learned by then to take pretty matter-of-factly.

> My younger brother, Jackson, was just seventeen. Here we were, the two surviving Courtrights, having already, in the course of our westering progress, buried two little brothers, three little sisters, an older sister, three darkies, our mother, and now look! Father's tongue was black as a boot.

McMurtry's second point cut deeper: In attempting to tear down the "Triumphalist myths" about the West that have become ingrained in the American fiber, revisionists hurt their own case by "so rarely do[ing] justice to the quality of imagination that constitutes part of the truth." Precisely because the West was so hard on its pioneers, McMurtry pointed out, some amount of embellishment was necessary for survival and, ultimately, for success: "The Triumphalists write about a West where people had callings and were sustained by them. The Revisionists see a West where people had only jobs, and crappy, environmentally destructive jobs at that."

Underlying his sense of callings and moral sustenance are family memories. "My own grandparents were vulnerable pioneers," he writes in *Oh What a Slaughter*, "which is perhaps one reason I began this inquiry." They had settled in a part of Texas still considered Comanche country in the 1870s. Having known them, McMurtry wrote in *Walter Benjamin*, distinguishes him as "one of the few writers who can still claim to have had prolonged and intimate contact with first-generation American pioneers, men and women who came to a nearly absolute emptiness and began the filling of it themselves." Of working on *Lonesome Dove* he has written, "I didn't feel that I was writing about the Old West, in capital letters—I was merely writing about my grandfather's time, and my uncles', none of whom seemed like men of another time to me."

This may partly explain the persistent failure of McMurtry's intentions in his Western writings: he aims to "demythicize" America's western expansion, yet feels duty-bound to combat its demonization by West revisionists. On the one hand, as he wrote in his first collection of essays—*In a Narrow Grave: Essays on Texas* (1968)—American pioneers (like his grandparents) were "people whom one could not but love." On the other hand, in that book and subsequently, he celebrates the fact that the pioneers' time—and all it entailed (or so he hopes, but this is less certain)—is dead and gone.

### Things Will Happen

McMurtry's disillusion with the life of his forebears surfaced early on. Contrasting himself and his father, he recounts that his father at the age of 12 had driven a herd of steers 40 miles alone, sold them, bought new ones, and driven them home, whereas he at that age had read *Don Quixote* and become alienated from his bookless surround-



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ings. In *Roads: Driving America's Great Highways* (2000), McMurtry writes that Marcel Proust provided for him what "the grasslands were to my father, a great subtle text which would repay endless study." Following his university training in Denton, Houston, and Stanford, McMurtry made a splash in Texas literary circles in the mid-1960s by attacking the "Big Three" of Texas letters at the time—J. Frank Dobie, Walter Prescott Webb, and Roy Bedichek—for their idea that rural life could hold a candle to the life of the intellect. That his alienation was reciprocated is evidenced in a letter he received while at Rice University from his Uncle Jeff, a former Texas Ranger and cowboy who had known Geronimo and Quanah Parker:

> What does PhD stand for? To me its post-hole digger, guess that would be about what it would stand for with all the other old Texas cowpokes.... I never could understand why a man wanted to spend all his life going to school, ide get to thinking about the Rancho Grandy, and get rambling on my mind.... [G]oing to school was always like being in jail to me, life is too short, sweet and uncertain to spend it in jail....

Uncle Jeff was responding to condolences on the death of his wife of 40 years in a car wreck. Not until the letter's end, between noting the onset of pink eye and questioning the sanity of Jehovah's Witnesses, did he finally refer to the accident: "Yes it was an awful tragidy to have Mint crushed in the smashup, my car was a total loss too. Things like that will just hoppen though...." McMurtry comments dryly: "I doubt that Seneca himself could have balanced the car and the wife that simply, and this one week after she was gone." Along the same lines, he recalls (in *Walter Benjamin*) an incident in his youth when a neighboring German dairy farmer woke up one morning and milked his cows, then shot himself. The cowboys at his father's ranch at the time seemed unaffected by the suicide itself, but debated endlessly whether it had been conscientious or foolish for the farmer to have bothered milking beforehand. "Where emotion was concerned," McMurtry has written, "the cowboy's ethic was Roman." Of Charles Goodnight—a legendary Texas cattle baron known as the Old Man of the Plains (and one of the models for *Lonesome Dove*'s Woodrow Call)—he notes that "Kipling would have approved of [such men], for they looked on triumph and disaster with the same stoic, unwavering, unsentimental eye." Typically, McMurtry describes this character with equal parts disapproval and nostalgia.

One of McMurtry's teachers at Stanford, novelist Wallace Stegner, once wrote that "even while the cowboy myth romanticizes and falsifies western life, it says something true about western, and American, character." McMurtry's work is infused with this paradox, though he resists it. In *The Colonel and Little Missie*, he suggests that the idea of the West exported to the eastern U.S. and Europe by Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show, under the manly theme "Advance of Civilization," was somehow akin to Madonna's artificial self-promotion in the 1980s. Yet he cites against this view, among others, no less an authority than Mark Twain, who wrote (prior to Cody's European tours) that the Wild West Show

> brought back to me the breezy, wild life of the Rocky Mountains and stirred me like a war song. Down to its smallest detail the show is genuine.... [I]t is often said on the other side of the water that none of the exhibitions which we send to England are purely and distinctively American. If you will take the Wild West show over there you can remove that reproach.

In the same book, McMurtry comments:

> The director John Ford is said to have decreed that if you have to choose between the truth and the legend, print the legend. From my experience I'd say that there's really no choice: for most readers and viewers it's the legend or nothing.

This is triply misleading. First, with regard to the quote's provenance: Ford did not say it; a newspaperman in Ford's *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* did. Second, the quote is wrong. What the newspaperman says is, "*When the legend becomes fact*, print the legend." These two errors may be excused by the fact, as related by director Peter Bogdanovich, that McMurtry—although he has worked extensively in Hollywood and has reaped a fortune from film adaptations of his novels—dislikes films and knows little about them. But the third error reflects a kind of willful blindness: McMurtry's own writings, at their best, show that legend and fact intertwine.

### Strong Lives

A RECURRING MCMURTRY THEME IS HOW brief a historical moment the Old West spanned: from the Lewis and Clark expedition to Wounded Knee, he points out, was the length of one long lifetime. The debate over how to understand America's western expansion has already far eclipsed it in length, and McMurtry is an ambivalent but valuable figure in that debate. In his introduction to *Winning the Wild West: The Epic Saga of the American Frontier* (2002), by Page Stegner, the son of his old teacher, McMurtry writes in an elegiac tone:

> My grandparents came to Texas as pioneers in the 1870s. In time they produced twelve children...eventually producing nearly fifty children of their own. I have a wonderful photograph taken at the first McMurtry family reunion near Clarendon, Texas, in 1918.... Eighty years later...I made a speech at the opening of a new library in Pampa, just a few miles from where the picture was taken. Only two people in the large audience had ever heard of the McMurtrys, although the uncle I was named for had fallen to his death from a grain elevator just three blocks from where I spoke. We came as pioneers, we worked extremely hard, for a time we prospered; then the old folks died and their children died; little by little the hard-acquired land got sold and vanished, making it a close question as to what exactly we won. Strong lives, I suppose.

Yet three years later he collected an Academy Award for helping adapt for the screen Annie Proulx's *Brokeback Mountain*, a pathetic short story about gay cowboys (actually, western sheepherders). This calls to mind McMurtry's long- and oft-expressed idea that the cowboy had a "concept of life that simply takes little account of women"—although in the past his point was that cowboys preferred the company of *horses*. It also recalls an essay he wrote in 1968 about *Hud*, the movie version of his novel *Horseman, Pass By* (1961), in which he judged the posture and gait of its star, Paul Newman, to be true to the cowboys on his father's ranch, but not Newman's eyes: "His look was introspected and self-occupied...he simply looked more curious about himself than most young ranchers look." Surely, in this respect, *Brokeback* stars Jake Gyllenhaal and Heath Ledger broke the mold even more.

One suspects that *Lonesome Dove* (rather than *Brokeback Mountain*) became such a popular phenomenon—and yes, "a kind of American Arthuriad"—because there is more of the Western character still alive and well in our country today than McMurtry thinks, or perhaps wishes. The question whether we remain capable of strong lives—or whether the postmodern forces of "feminine American self-doubt" will prove overpowering—is the most interesting moral question raised by his books on the West. In the final analysis, if we do prove so capable, we will owe McMurtry at least a parcel of our thanks. Or, as he might have it, blame.

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# BOOKS IN BRIEF

*To Dare and to Conquer: Special Operations and the Destiny of Nations, from Achilles to Al Qaeda*, by Derek Leebaert. Little, Brown & Company, 688 pages, $29.95 (cloth), $15.99 (paper)

Although Democrats have made expanding special forces a cornerstone of their "smarter and tougher" alternative policy for fighting terrorists, one suspects that in their hands these forces would be deployed abroad in much the same way social scientists were domestically in the 1960s—as the magic cure-all for problems Democrats don't understand or are not willing to face.

Anyone who views special forces as a panacea should read Derek Leebaert's capacious and engaging history of special operations from antiquity to today. The author, an informations systems consultant and Cold War scholar, is primarily concerned not with the "gee-whiz" gimmickry or extraordinary courage on display in many special ops, but with the ways in which these operations have proven decisive instruments of historical change. In this way, his approach is the inverse of Victor Davis Hanson's emphasis on Western armies' overwhelming superiority in large-scale conventional battles. We have arrived at a moment in warfare, according to Leebaert, when special operations are "the preeminent means of dealing with" terrorists and other "hidden evil powers of compact destruction." But, he warns, the use of special forces requires even more judiciousness than the use of conventional forces, and today's "respectably cool view" that we need more special forces without a grand strategy to inform their use is merely setting us up for disappointment or defeat. Leebaert is an Iraq war skeptic (perhaps opponent would be more apt) and thinks special forces offer an alternative to the imperial deployment of large conventional forces, as we have done in Iraq. Readers may not agree with all the judgments in this idiosyncratic and lively book, but it deserves to be read alongside Robert Kaplan's *Imperial Grunts* (2005) and Hanson's many insightful works.

—Steven F. Hayward
American Enterprise Institute

*The West at War*, edited by Bradley C.S. Watson. Lexington Books, 234 pages, $75 (cloth), $27.95 (paper)

Bradley C.S. Watson, a political science professor at St. Vincent's College, has skillfully assembled eleven essays that examine the current struggle with Islamic jihad from a philosophical perspective too often lacking in other studies. Correctly viewing jihad as an attack on the West and all it stands for, these essays approach the struggle by trying to define the nature of the enemy and the nature of the West, and identifying the strengths and weaknesses of both. Paul Marshall's "Understanding Radical Islam" rightly locates the motives of the jihadists in the history and ideology of Islam, rather than in local grievances such as Palestine or Iraq. Turning to the West, James Kurth and Leon Craig decry the decadence and secularization that have left the West, and especially Europe, vulnerable to the spiritual fervor of Muslim immigrants. But are individualism, democracy, tolerance, and free-market capitalism the true culprits as Kurth and Craig suggest? Other notable essays include David Corey's study of the Christian "just war" tradition, which offers a powerful rebuttal of pacifism; Professor Watson's own "Ethics and Terror," which likewise makes a case for the current war's ethical and moral justification; and Robert Alt's "Media Bias in Iraq," a damning indictment of the way the media's skewed reporting furthers the jihadists' aims.

—Bruce S. Thornton
California State University, Fresno

*A Glorious Disaster: Barry Goldwater's Presidential Campaign and the Origins of the Conservative Movement*, by J. William Middendorf II. Basic Books, 290 pages, $26.95

The day after losing the 1964 presidential election with only 27 million votes (to Lyndon Johnson's 43 million), Barry Goldwater told the press, "Twenty-seven million votes is a lot of votes." Conservatives believed that they had taken a major step in their battle to overturn New Deal liberalism.

J. William Middendorf, treasurer to the Goldwater presidential campaign, offers an inside account of the Goldwater movement from its origins to its defeat. In putting together the draft Goldwater movement, F. Clifton White, Peter O'Donnell, William Rusher, and others assembled a grassroots campaign that carried Goldwater to the nomination in San Francisco. Following the convention, less able managers took over the campaign.

Middendorf's admiration for Goldwater, the man and the symbol, is evident throughout the book, but the author also reveals the candidate's missteps—driving in a Cadillac with his wife Peggy in a fur coat during the New Hampshire primary, his general crankiness with the press, and his frequent refusal to stop and shake hands with voters at campaign rallies. Middendorf's account is persuasive in showing how this defeat launched a critical turn in our history as conservatism became a potent force in American politics.

—Donald T. Critchlow
Saint Louis University

*Lincoln Unmasked: What You're Not Supposed to Know About Dishonest Abe*, by Thomas DiLorenzo. Crown Forum, 224 pages, $22.95

In this sequel to his 2002 diatribe, *The Real Lincoln*, Loyola College economist Thomas DiLorenzo continues his assault on America's 16th president. In some minor ways, *Lincoln Unmasked* is better than *The Real Lincoln*. In the first book, Lincoln was barely allowed to speak a full sentence, but this time he speaks in sentences on at least five separate pages. Moreover, unlike the earlier book, most of the quotations in *Lincoln Unmasked* appear to be authentic and are not attributed to the wrong authors.

Otherwise, DiLorenzo serves up more of the same bombast, repeatedly denouncing all scholars who attempt to understand Lincoln sympathetically as "court historians," part of a "Lincoln Cult," whose writings are "myth, fantasy, and idolatry." He almost never engages them in actual argumentation, however. More importantly, he refuses to abandon his oversimplified economic analysis, which is woefully inadequate to explain the legal, political, philosophic, religious, and cultural forces that erupted in the Civil War. For instance, DiLorenzo never explains the nature of abolitionism and its effects on Southern opinion, nor does he even acknowledge such momentous antebellum transformations as the positive-good theory of slavery, the 1854 Kansas-Nebraska Act, or the schism in the Democratic Party's 1860 presidential convention.

DiLorenzo's flawed economic view of history causes him to see only what he likes in the South, while unfairly demonizing the North. He complains, for example, that "Yankees never shied away from using the coercive powers of government to compel others to be remade in their image." Yet on the eve of the war Southerners were demanding federal protection for slavery in *all*



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the territories—what, at that time, would have amounted to the greatest increase in the federal government's power in American history.

Professor DiLorenzo writes about Lincoln because he says he wants to recover limited, constitutional government. But his methods are simply not up to the task his subject demands.

—Thomas L. Krannawitter
Hillsdale College

*Something That Will Surprise the World: The Essential Writings of the Founding Fathers*, edited by Susan Dunn. Crown Forum, 470 pages, $32

This collection of writings from our most important founders—Washington, Hamilton, Adams, Jefferson, and Madison—runs the gamut from political essays to letters to diary entries. Williams College professor of humanities Susan Dunn entices the reader with her introduction, ably depicting these men and the contradictions they embodied. "On the surface," she writes, "they appeared reluctant to lead" and looked forward to receding from the public stage. Yet a young John Adams declared, "Reputation ought to be the perpetual subject of my Thoughts, and Aim of my behavior."

Readers familiar with the founding generation, however, likely have little use for the documents presented in this collection, most of which can be found elsewhere. For those unfamiliar with the founding, this is not the place to begin because Dunn's well-meaning selections lack the context and editorial guidance that are necessary to keep non-specialists from feeling adrift. Perhaps a better point of departure would be one of the extraordinary biographies of the founders that have appeared in recent years.

—Eliana Johnson
Council on Foreign Relations

*The Trouble with Diversity: How We Learned to Love Identity and Ignore Inequality*, by Walter Benn Michaels. Metropolitan Books, 256 pages, $23

This is a bad book with an interesting premise. Walter Benn Michaels, head of the English department at the University of Illinois at Chicago, is fed up with his fellow liberals' obsession with diversity—from affirmative action in college admissions, to the army of diversity workshops, programs, and mission statements that have conquered corporate America, to the left-wing conceit that every culture and language in the world needs to be protected from the ravages of globalization. Diversity, he argues, is "a rich people's solution" to economic injustice, a way for the well-off to surround themselves with classmates and business partners who *look* like America, the better to ignore the inequalities of opportunity that keep the poor and working class out of the ivory tower and the boardroom.

This is true enough, but unfortunately Benn Michaels seems to think that it's the only true thing there is. So instead of merely suggesting that race and culture may be less important to American life than class divisions, he spends much of the book arguing that race is a complete fiction, that neither culture nor language should matter to anyone with any sense, and that children are defined by their parents' bank accounts and little else. Meanwhile, the complexities of what inequality means in a wealthy country like the United States are brushed aside, as is the crucial question of whether money-equality or civic-equality is more important to democratic self-government. Instead, *The Trouble With Diversity* summons left-wingers to the barricades to fight for, among other dumb and hopeless causes, the abolition of private schools. Good luck with that.

—Ross Douthat
*Atlantic Monthly*

*The Sum Total of Human Happiness*, by James V. Schall, S.J. St. Augustine's Press, 218 pages, $28

Early in *The Sum Total of Human Happiness*, Fr. James Schall writes, "If we ever have the exhilarating experience of truth in our souls, we cannot but seek to tell others of it." The line is autobiographical. This book is energized by Schall's joy of knowing. His learning is profound because knowing is a moral imperative for him, but it is ultimately a matter of joy. And joy is infectious.

His charming but profound reflections present questions that are not Catholic, but answers that are, steeped in sources as diverse as Hilaire Belloc, Plato, Tolkien, and even Charlie Brown, among others—including Samuel Johnson, from whom he got the title. An Aristotelian to the core, Schall always begins with experience. Thus the central thesis of the book is "that everything *that is* should receive its proper acknowledgment." That includes the recognition that *what is* (i.e., creation) is good.

This is important because "the drama of our existence is not merely that we are, but that we can respond to *what is* as if it might not be." This latter response is the source of evil in human behavior and, in institutionalized form, the foundation of modern ideology. In graduate school many years ago, I asked a friend, who was enthusiastically expounding on Hegel, how he would live if what Hegel said about the nature of reality were true. He was startled by the question and had no answer. For Schall, how we ought to live exactly depends on what we know—on what we *should* know. Of course, one can know the truth and reject it, "as if it might not be." Yet the only way back from this path, as indicated in the book's opening quotation from Augustine is that, "when we return from error, it is by knowledge that we return."

—Robert R. Reilly
*Crisis*

*Praeambula Fidei: Thomism and the God of the Philosophers*, by Ralph McInerny. The Catholic University of America Press, 313 pages, $34.95

With his latest book, *Praeambula Fidei: Thomism and the God of the Philosophers*, Professor Ralph McInerny of Notre Dame University takes issue with several prominent 20th-century Neo-Thomists, especially Étienne Gilson, Henri de Lubac, and Marie-Dominique Chenu. His charge is that these three French scholars and their associates have smudged the line between philosophy and theology and have thus undermined the very cornerstone of Thomas Aquinas's intellectual project. Gilson, the principal culprit, suggests that Aquinas's supposedly philosophical insights were really drawn from biblical revelation and were thus based on faith, making it impossible for Thomistic philosophy to address itself to non-Christians and pushing it into something resembling fideism.

But Aquinas, says McInerny, was very careful to distinguish properly between the realms of reason and revelation. The implication of the Thomistic position is that, while philosophy can never understand the essence of God, it can offer demonstrative arguments for the existence of God and for a few of the basic divine attributes, such as eternity, infinity, and simplicity. These are not articles of faith, such as one would find in a Christian creed, but they do constitute the *praeambula fidei*, the preambles of faith.

Although McInerny's criticism of the French Neo-Thomists at times borders on the *ad hominem*, he also has plenty of evidence to convict them of getting Aquinas's crucial distinction quite wrong. The book does not spin out the implications of its argument for ethics and politics, but it is easy to see that neither Aquinas's natural-law theory nor his thoughts on the cardinal virtues can survive scrutiny unless the integrity of Thomistic philosophy is upheld. Both believers and non-believers who think that modernity needs to be tempered by antiquity's wisdom will sympathize.

—Douglas Kries
Gonzaga University



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Book Review by Steven J. Lenzner

# Guide for the Perplexed

*Leo Strauss: An Introduction to His Thought and Intellectual Legacy*, by Thomas L. Pangle.
Johns Hopkins University Press, 200 pages, $19.95

*Reading Leo Strauss: Politics, Philosophy, Judaism*, by Steven B. Smith.
University of Chicago Press, 268 pages, $32.50

*The Truth about Leo Strauss: Political Philosophy and American Democracy*, by Catherine H. Zuckert and Michael Zuckert.
University of Chicago Press, 320 pages, $32.50

*Fame is a form—perhaps the worst form—of incomprehension.*

—Jorge Luis Borges

In recent years, as the name of the political philosopher Leo Strauss has grown increasingly familiar, his teaching has become increasingly misunderstood. Indeed, the portrait painted sometimes of Strauss as the posthumous mastermind of the Bush Doctrine does not even rise to the level of caricature—for a caricature, however distorted, bears some resemblance to its model.

Strauss was born in Germany in 1899, emigrated as the Nazis rose to power, and came at last to the United States in the late 1930s. While teaching at the New School and at the University of Chicago, he founded a "school" whose members seek to further his aim of restoring true liberal education. By far Strauss's most important legacy is his books—such works as *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (1952), *Thoughts on Machiavelli* (1958), and *Socrates and Aristophanes* (1966). In those books he succeeds not simply in reviving the serious study of political philosophy and its history, but in according to *political* philosophy an unprecedented prominence. No less important in his rediscovery of the philosophic arts of reading and writing, which provide us access to virtually every great work written prior to the 19th century.

These achievements, however, have been temporarily eclipsed by ascriptions to Strauss of an imaginary political influence—one that he neither sought nor would have welcomed. When the frenzy was at its peak, we were regaled with accounts of how the evil genius's disciples employed noble lies to manufacture the war in Iraq—a fairy tale repeated in such publications as the *New Yorker*, *Newsweek*, and *Harper's*. The breathless jeremiad in *Harper's*—"Leo Strauss, George Bush and the Philosophy of Mass Deception"—intoned that "there appears to be no end to the damage that is being done in the name of Leo Strauss."

Strauss's students and friends have come to his defense, and in these three new books, intended for a general audience, the authors easily lay to rest the worst of the canards spread by his enemies in the academy and the media (two realms that seem increasingly as one). Still, as welcome and useful as these books are for introducing Strauss to a wider audience, they fail to provide an account of him that does justice to his twin arts of reading and writing. Such an account would free readers from some common misperceptions, and inoculate them against some misunderstandings that even Straussians are heir to.

To his credit, Thomas Pangle, in *Leo Strauss: An Introduction to His Thought and Intellectual Legacy*, recognizes that engaging Strauss's media critics directly would be worse than an exercise in futility: why dignify—and thus perpetuate—a "debate" that can only serve to obscure further Strauss's thought? Instead, Pangle seeks to use that controversy as an opportunity to provide "an accurate, brief and nonpolemical introduction to Strauss's mature thought and intellectual legacy." The book consists of four chapters, three devoted to explicating aspects of Strauss's thought, the final and most extensive chapter exploring "writings that exhibit the extension of Strauss's influence into the more practical, 'empirical,' and subphilosophic fields of social and political commentary."

Pangle, who holds the Joe R. Long Chair in Democratic Studies at the University of Texas at Austin, brings to his task remarkable erudition, and his volume may be said to have succeeded in restoring, and perhaps even deepening, the more sober view of Strauss's intention



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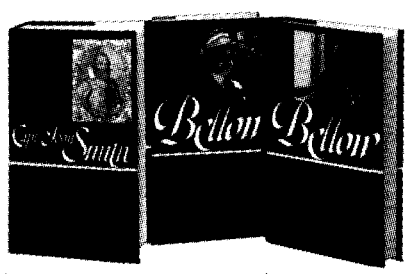

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that prevailed in his lifetime and for a decade or so after his death. According to that opinion, Strauss sought to revive "the quarrel between the ancients and the moderns," a quarrel in which he championed the "ancients" or, as he preferred to call them, the "classics." Such is the view, for example, that Alexandre Kojève seemingly took for granted in his famous debate with Strauss in the early 1950s. By Pangle's account, Strauss's recovery of the genuine Socratic teaching enables us to encounter political philosophy at the moment of its greatest self-awareness, when it is most awake to its preconditions and its precariousness.

Pangle's intention, stated in his somewhat clotted prose, is to offer "a guide to Strauss's writings that approaches them from the perspective of an attempt to answer the question of their significance for our understanding of the deeply problematic roots of the contemporary political world in which we find ourselves historically situated." One wonders whether this perspective is congruent with that of the Strauss who spoke of our urgent need for "an understanding of the genesis of historicism that does not take for granted the soundness of historicism." At the very least, one must say that Pangle's prominent use of such terms as "human existence" gives his writing resonances absent in Strauss.

IN READING LEO STRAUSS, STEVEN B. SMITH, the Alfred Cowles Professor of Political Science at Yale University, brings together five essays published over the past 15 years, all under the rubric of Strauss's relation to American liberal democracy. This question directly informs the book's introduction and two concluding chapters, which appear in print for the first time.

Smith justly objects to ugly distortions of Strauss as a subverter of liberal democracy and, more generally, to any attempt to make hay politically by the invocation of Strauss's name. He makes the case for Strauss "as a friend of liberal democracy—one of the best friends democracy has ever had." And Smith rightly, if too cautiously, notes that "although [Strauss] has come to be associated with conservatism, it is probably more accurate to say that he saw politics from neither the Right nor from the Left but from above."

Nevertheless, in opposing the political misuse of Strauss, Smith occasionally falls victim to the same temptation. He markedly overstates Strauss's affinity and concern with modern liberalism. Smith asserts: "Strauss's politics, such as they were, had more in common with cold-war liberals of his generation—Isaiah Berlin, Lionel Trilling, Walter Lippmann, Raymond Aron—than with any of the major conservative figures of the same period"—a statement belied by Strauss's recently published correspondence with Willmoore Kendall, a senior editor of *National Review.* Nor would Strauss likely have been grateful for Smith's attempt to associate him with John Stuart Mill: "For those surprised to see Strauss in this company," writes Smith, "see 'Liberal Educational Responsibility' [*sic*]...where Strauss endorses Mill's scheme for proportional representation." Strauss's characterization of that scheme, however, falls far short of an endorsement: "For reasons which are not all bad, Mill's remedy has come to be regarded as insufficient, not to say worthless." Though Strauss certainly was appreciative of the American Founders' accomplishment, one would be hard pressed to find in his work evidence to support Smith's claim that Strauss "treated the American founding as an important philosophical moment in the development of modernity."

Given his focus on Strauss and modern liberalism, the division of his book into two sections titled "Jerusalem" and "Athens" may seem strange. But he has a certain idiosyncratic understanding of Strauss's concern with these two symbolically timeless cities. For Smith, however, Strauss's concern with these themes is more timely than timeless. In the section on "Jerusalem," Smith doesn't explicate Strauss's writings on the Bible, Maimonides, and Halevi, but examines how Strauss's deep engagement with the Jewish tradition enabled him to confront the problem of being a Jew today. Hence Smith treats us to such chapters as "How Jewish Was Leo Strauss?" and "Gershom Scholem and Leo Strauss: Notes Toward a German-Jewish Dialogue." For similar reasons, Smith's chapter on "Strauss's Spinoza" focuses on Strauss's "Preface to Spinoza's Critique of Religion"—the so-called "autobiographical preface"—rather than on "How to Study Spinoza's *Theologico-Political Treatise,*" which is the mature Strauss's only sustained interpretation of Spinoza. Despite these quirks, Smith's conclusion that Strauss deserves to be regarded as a Jew at once loyal and non-believing has much to recommend it.

No less worthy is Smith's desire to show in the section on "Athens" a Strauss whose recovery of classical political philosophy was made in a spirit wholly free of dogmatism. Yet almost all of Smith's "Athenian" chapters are firmly rooted in the 20th century. Thus Smith articulates Strauss's recovery of the classics in terms of Strauss's implicit critique of Martin Heidegger, his celebrated debate with Alexandre Kojève, and his understanding of America. By such an approach, Smith prevents himself from asking whether the presentation of the classics that Strauss thought useful and proper for his contemporaries corresponded to his own



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genuine understanding of Plato, Xenophon, and Aristotle. Though it would be unjust to say that Smith falls into the error of treating Strauss "primarily as a contemporary among his contemporaries," he nonetheless seems to regard Strauss chiefly as a great contemporary among his great contemporaries.

CATHERINE AND MICHAEL ZUCKERT'S *The Truth about Leo Strauss* is disappointing, especially given the good work its authors have done before. The Zuckerts, the husband-and-wife team who are both Nancy R. Dreux Professors of Political Science at Notre Dame, present a Strauss who is formulaic, doctrinaire, and, worst of all, uninteresting. Their book consists of two parts. The first and more extensive is devoted to setting forth their view of Strauss and his teaching; the second examines some of the more prominent debates among Straussians concerning "the character of American democracy."

A notable virtue of their book is that it makes the question of how to read Strauss—in particular, whether Strauss should be read as he read the greatest authors of the past—a matter of central concern. One can be confident that in years to come scholars will increasingly recognize how important this question is for the right understanding of Strauss.

The Zuckerts take a tack opposite to Pangle's: they expend considerable energy to trace the popular distortions of Strauss to their proximate academic source. They identify as the culprit Shadia Drury's 1988 *The Political Ideas of Leo Strauss*, the book treated most extensively in *The Truth about Leo Strauss*. Indeed, the bulk of their treatment of Strauss is an explicit response to Drury's various misrepresentations of him as a champion of the amoral and the immoral. In responding to Drury's fictions, however, they obscure what Strauss taught concerning the necessary tension between philosophy and society. Though the Zuckerts' Strauss formally acknowledges that tension, his practice gives the lie to his teaching. For their Strauss tells the truth—and nothing but the truth—and he is so far from corrupting the young that he restores the prejudices of the old. Antiquity is good. Modernity is bad.

The Zuckerts' interest throughout is not so much in how and what Strauss thought, as upon what, or whose, side he came down. They see nothing problematic about describing Strauss as "a partisan of the ancients." So far from being a disinterested lover of truth, the Zuckerts' Strauss can only grudgingly acknowledge an opponent's grasp of the obvious: "Strauss was open minded enough to concede that Machiavelli hit a correct chord when he emphasized the necessary; it is not always possible, Strauss admitted, to achieve the good or the best."

A no less serious problem with the volume is the authors' carelessness. A few examples will suffice. They correctly take Stanley Rosen to task (as others have done) for reading with insufficient care Strauss's famous sentence from the Introduction to *Thoughts on Machiavelli*: "The problem inherent in the surface of things, and only in the surface of things, is the heart of things." On the same page the Zuckerts then misquote twice that same sentence, speaking first of "the problem in the surface of things" and then of "the problem inhering in the surface of things."

On the next page, they contort an even more well-known passage from *Natural Right and History* (1953). That passage, in which Strauss articulates the chain of thought that led Max Weber to despair of the possibility of philosophy, concludes: "The mere fact that philosophy and revelation cannot refute each other would constitute the refutation of philosophy by revelation." According to the Zuckerts, the sentence in question reads: "The mere fact that philosophy and revelation cannot refute each other would constitute the refutation of *the life of* philosophy by revelation" (my emphasis). Then—immediately upon having censured a scholar for failing to attend to "what Strauss actually said"—they offer an interpretation that emphasizes the very words they saw fit to add.

WHATEVER THE RELATIVE MERITS of the three volumes under review, none of them adequately addresses a question of central importance: how Leo Strauss should be read. Pangle's statement that his book "speaks as much as possible in the terms and even in the very words of Strauss himself, doing so with a meticulous attention to the authentic context of whatever I quote," shows that he is alive to the question. One must immediately add, however, that his actions fall short of his words; else, to give one important example, he would not use "ancient political philosophy" and "classical republican political theory"—terms not to be found in Strauss's writings—as synonymous with "classical political philosophy."

As befits its title, Smith's *Reading Leo Strauss* is graced by a general statement on how to read Strauss that shows rare insight: "Strauss wrote as he read, that is, with an awareness that there are multiple kinds of readers with different interests and different needs and that like any good teacher it is necessary to address them in different ways." Smith rightly recognizes that in order to substantiate his observation, it is necessary to show Strauss employing the kind of literary devices he discovered in other authors.


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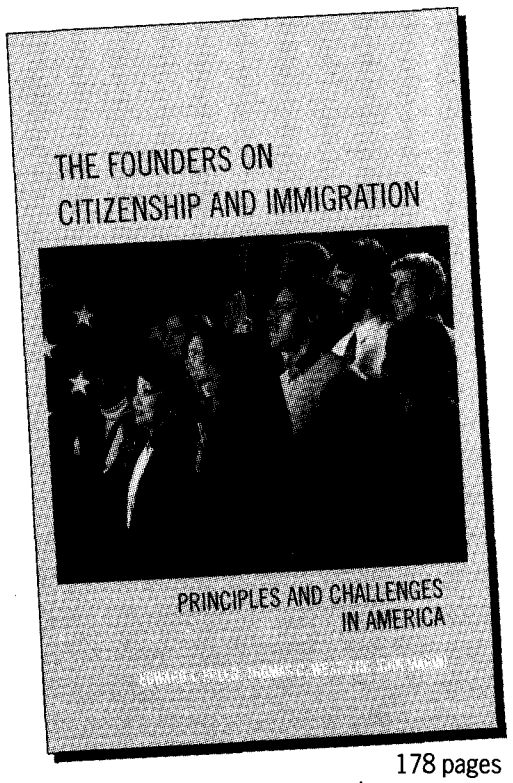


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But is Smith's execution equal to his insight? The work that Smith devotes the most attention to is *Natural Right and History*'s subchapter on John Locke, but Smith's own concern with Strauss's view of American liberal democracy appears to blind him to certain peculiarities of Strauss's Locke. The question of Strauss's understanding of Locke the philosopher is of little interest to Smith, especially relative to what he regards as Strauss's literary coronation of Locke "as America's philosopher-king." "It is not an exaggeration to say that Strauss's judgment on Locke *is* his judgment on America." Tempting as it may be to argue with Smith's claim, one only has to grant it to see the limits of his reading of Strauss. For contrary to what *Reading Leo Strauss* suggests, Strauss's judgment on Locke is anything but straightforward. Locke appears in a number of strikingly different guises in Strauss's writings, and it is only by seeing how Strauss's partial Lockes fit together to form a single whole that one could discern Strauss's "judgment on Locke."

In *Natural Right and History* one finds three distinct Lockes. The first is almost classical in character and conception (pp. 202-214). He teaches no characteristically modern doctrines. Moreover, he speaks and writes in a manner that closely resembles that of "the typical premodern philosopher" presented in Strauss's *Persecution and the Art of Writing*: a thinker can legitimately employ "cautious speech" to achieve a "noble work," to avoid persecution, and to help maintain public order. The central Locke is modern but moderate (214-234). And the third and final Locke is the famous modern revolutionary (234-251): the clear-eyed hedonist who set out to emancipate material acquisitiveness and, by so doing, almost single-handedly affected a moral revolution.

To discover Strauss's judgment on Locke one would have to consider, in addition, Strauss's other substantial treatment of Locke, the later essay "Locke's Doctrine of Natural Law." In reading the two side by side, one is bewildered by the disproportion between their respective conclusions. *Natural Right*'s famous summary of Locke's teaching—"Life is the joyless quest for joy"—is perhaps the most dismissive sentence to be found in Strauss's writings. "Locke's Doctrine of Natural Law," however, concludes by elevating the English philosopher to almost the heights of philosophic understanding: "In quoting the beginning of that passage of the *Nichomachean Ethics* which deals with natural right, Locke apparently made a slip (112 n.3); he certainly understood the passage in exactly the same way in which it had been understood by Averroës." What is one then to make of Strauss's judgment on Locke?

But if Pangle's and Smith's efforts to grapple with the question of how to read Strauss are incomplete, those of the Zuckerts are positively misleading. On no point are the Zuckerts more insistent than that Strauss did not write "esoterically"; indeed, they devote their central chapter—"The Man Who Gave Away the Secrets: On Esotericism"—to this contention. According to them, and their Strauss, avowed esotericism would be an absurdity: "Esoteric writing is a way, Strauss tells us, to convey secrets. The way to write esoterically is not to call attention to esotericism. One must announce one's esotericism esoterically." Had Strauss shared this view he would not have devoted the central chapter of *Persecution and the Art of Writing* to Maimonides's *Guide for the Perplexed*, and especially to its general Introduction, in which Maimonides speaks emphatically about the kinds of secrets the *Guide* contains, even going so far as to inform the reader what kinds of contradictions he will encounter in its pages. Far from regarding avowed "esotericism" as an exercise in futility, Strauss highlighted Maimonides's open pronouncement of his literary practice.

"On the face of it," the Zuckerts argue, "Strauss would seem the anti-esoteric, not the devotee of esotericism in his own writings, despite his dictum that a man writes as he reads. This dictum applied to writers *in the past* who did not make esotericism centrally thematic to their writing and thereby preserved it as an option for themselves" (emphasis added). Had the Zuckerts quoted this "dictum" in context—or even provided a citation to it—their readers could judge for themselves whether its application was limited to writers of the past; but they do not. The statement occurs towards the outset of the concluding chapter of *Persecution and the Art of Writing*:

> In order to know what degree or kind of exactness is required for the understanding of a given writing, one must therefore first know the author's habits of writing. But since these habits become truly known only through the understanding of the writer's work, it would seem that at the beginning one cannot help being guided by one's preconceived notions of the author's character. The procedure would be more simple if there were a way of ascertaining an author's manner of writing prior to interpreting his works. It is a general observation that people write as they read. As a rule, careful writers are careful readers and *vice versa*. A careful writer wants to be read carefully. He cannot know what it means to be read carefully but by having done careful reading himself. Reading precedes writing. We read before we write. We learn to write by reading. A man learns to write well by reading well good books, by reading most carefully books which are most carefully written. We may therefore acquire some previous knowledge of an author's habits of writing by studying his habits of reading. The task is simplified if the author in question explicitly discusses the right manner of reading books in general, or of reading a particular book which he has studied with a great deal of attention.

Not only does Strauss fail to restrict the application of his maxim to "writers in the past," as claimed by the Zuckerts, but he emphatically states it in the present tense.

Let me try to bring out more clearly what is lost by the failure to read Strauss with adequate care by making some observations on the widespread belief that *Natural Right and History* is Strauss's greatest book. To most scholars of Strauss it is almost an article of faith that his great work is *Natural Right and History*. So widespread is this opinion that one peruses the scholarship in vain for an argument justifying it. Thus Smith asserts that *Natural Right and History* is Strauss's "most important work." The Zuckerts speak of "Strauss's major work *Natural Right and History*," and throughout their book take it for granted that an essential part of Strauss's "return to the ancients" is his championing of "natural right." Is this common opinion true?

Strauss's method for ranking other writers' works can be profitably employed in ranking his work. In *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, Strauss employs Machiavelli's epistles dedicatory in order to demonstrate that the *Prince* and the *Discourses on Livy* were Machiavelli's two great works. Strauss pays minute attention to the author's brief and apparently offhand statements as to his motivations and reasons for writing the respective works. Strauss did not, of course, write epistles dedicatory. He did, however, at least for some of his books, write brief prefaces that speak to the status of the works themselves within Strauss's corpus. Consider the parallel prefaces to three books that originated as lecture series—*Natural Right and History*, *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, and *The City and Man* (1964).

At first glance all three prefaces seem inconsequential, little more than acknowledgments. On closer examination they reveal each book's respective rank in Strauss's corpus. Both *Natural Right* and *Thoughts* were originally presented as Walgreen lectures, and Strauss employs almost verbatim the same formulations in both to thank the Walgreen foundation for its spon-



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sorship; the differences, however, deserve attention. In the original preface to *Natural Right*, Strauss thanks the foundation and its chair for "inducing me to present coherently my observations on the problem of natural right." The parallel in *Thoughts* thanks the foundation and its chair "for giving me the opportunity to present my observations and reflections on the problem of Machiavelli." Strauss had to be induced to present coherently his observations on the problem of natural right; it was not something he did, as it were, on his own accord. On the other hand, he needed no inducement to present his observations *and reflections* on the problem of Machiavelli; the Walgreen foundation simply afforded him with a convenient opportunity to do what he would have otherwise done. One might say that the two problems stand in the relation of necessity to choice, and "necessity and choice are related to each other as the low and the high." *Natural Right* is a bow to necessities imposed by his times; whereas with *Thoughts* Strauss freely seizes the opportunity to philosophize.

The preface from *The City and Man* indicates that that book stands somewhere in between *Natural Right* and *Thoughts*. There he expresses gratitude to the lectures' sponsor "for having given me the opportunity to develop my views on a rather neglected aspect of classical political thought more fully than I otherwise might have done." Though Strauss did not need to be induced to develop his views on this neglected aspect of classical political philosophy, he may not have done so without the opportunity in question.

Though Pangle does identify *Natural Right and History* as Strauss's most important book, he suggests that it is "his most synoptic work." Given that *Natural Right* seems to cover the entire ground from Homer to Strauss's day, this seems a reasonable enough description; but if one places it side by side with *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, one sees just how much *Natural Right* doesn't contain.

Though Natural Right and Persecution were published within a year of one another, they seem to have little in common. *Natural Right* devotes only a handful of pages to the philosophic art of writing, and it has almost nothing to say about the medieval thinkers discussed in *Persecution*. *Natural Right* makes thematic "the quarrel between the ancients and the moderns." In *Persecution* Strauss focuses instead on the continuity of the philosophic tradition: the work's preface states that Spinoza, typically classed with the moderns, "has been called, not altogether wrongly, 'the last of the medievals'"; and in the Introduction Strauss delineates a "tradition" of philosophic anticlericalism that elides the premodern-modern divide. In short, there is for Strauss what one may call a medieval complication to the quarrel between the ancients and the moderns, one that calls into question the adequacy of that distinction.

Strauss's understanding of the relation between pre-modern and modern thought is complicated even further by his infrequent statements on that theme in *Persecution*. The most basic of these occurs in the title essay, where Strauss suggests that the chief difference between the respective approaches stems from "what they think about popular education and its limits." Modern writers, generally speaking, "concealed their views only far enough to protect themselves as well as possible from persecution," whereas pre-modern authors held that "philosophy, or science, was essentially a privilege of 'the few.'" Such men believed "that public communication of the philosophic or scientific truth was impossible or undesirable, not only for the time being but for all times." What then are we to think of such modern writers as Montesquieu or Machiavelli whose works by that standard clearly fall into the pre-modern camp? Strauss would not have written that "[w]hat Montesquieu's private thoughts were will always remain controversial"—and this in the concluding sentences of his chapter "Classic Natural Right"—if Montesquieu's artistry were of the "modern" variety.

Attending with care to Strauss's literary art is not, as *The Truth about Leo Strauss* asserts, a barren exercise in self-confirmation. Careful reading of a careful writer yields results that are reliable and often unexpected. Such results can—and at the outset should—be at once modest and far-reaching. If scholars had been aware of the relative ranks of *Natural Right and History* and *Thoughts on Machiavelli* as indicated by their respective prefaces (and confirmed by the works themselves), would not the scholarship on Strauss have a very different cast? And perhaps even a new character?

One cannot say that the interest in Strauss generated by the recent storm has thus far proven to be a boon to the understanding of his thought. Of the plethora of books either spawned by or coinciding with this controversy, only Heinrich Meier's outstanding *Leo Strauss and the Theologico-Political Problem* has shown a satisfactory awareness of the demands Strauss's literary artistry places on the reader. And those demands are considerable, for Strauss's artistry is at once graceful and perplexing. Though the books by Pangle and Smith stand far above that of the Zuckerts, none supplies a reliable guide that, by argument and example, can teach students how to begin to navigate the beautiful labyrinths that are Strauss's writings.

*Steven J. Lenzner is the Henry Salvatori research fellow in political philosophy at Claremont McKenna College.*



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Book Review by Svetozar Minkov

# Philosophy and Revelation

*Leo Strauss and the Theologico-Political Problem*, by Heinrich Meier, translated by Marcus Brainard.
Cambridge University Press, 206 pages, $60 (cloth), $24.99 (paper)

Leo Strauss and the Theologico-*Political Problem* is a concentrated book, as remarkable in the economy and precision of its formulations as in the subtlety and ordered complexity of its thought. Its author, Heinrich Meier, has written important studies of Rousseau, Carl Schmitt, and Strauss. He is also the editor of Strauss's collected works in German, a most valuable contribution. Meier is interested in Strauss for the best of reasons: he thinks that Strauss might prove helpful in illuminating the most important matters and in guiding us to the recovery of the deepest human experiences. His new book, in addition to offering path-breaking analyses of Strauss's thought, makes available for the first time in print two fascinating lectures by Strauss: "The Living Issues of German Postwar Philosophy" and "Reason and Revelation."

The main theme of the book is the philosophic life and its relation to revealed religion. According to Meier, Leo Strauss was a philosopher, a term the author does not use lightly. Strauss was a philosopher in part because he "grasped philosophy as a way of life" and "reawakened the awareness that philosophy has to prove its rationality elenctically," that is, through refutations of fundamental alternatives. To be a philosopher is to live a life that is "grounded in unreserved questioning and stops at no answer that owes its authentication to an authority."

Meier observes that even among the very few philosophers of the 20th century, Strauss was unique in rekindling the quarrel between the ancients and moderns and the issue *behind* that quarrel. As Meier argues, reopening that quarrel is fundamentally the same as engaging in "the confrontation with the challenge of revelation." But why should revelation be seen as a challenge to philosophy?

According to Meier, the challenge is twofold. First, there is the theoretical challenge: if there is an omnipotent God in whose hands the universe is putty, there are no *knowable* necessities and the philosopher's pursuit of knowledge of these necessities is futile. As Meier puts it, "no philosopher has recalled with greater urgency than Strauss that 'being based on belief is fatal to any philosophy.'" Then there is the existential challenge: since revelation requires above all unquestioning obedience (a central claim of Meier's), the philosopher's apparently disobedient free inquiry might be subject to severe punishment—nothing less than eternal damnation.

As serious as these challenges are, both Meier and Strauss seem to think that philosophy requires its followers to seek from revelation even more radical challenges. But in their efforts to heighten the confrontation between reason and revelation, Meier and Strauss may exaggerate the challenge posed by revelation to philosophy. In his remarkable lecture on "Reason and Revelation," for example, Strauss emphasizes Luther, Kierkegaard, and the author of the Book of Genesis, each of whom rejects the possibility of a necessary ascent from natural knowledge to revelation. Strauss neglects Thomas Aquinas, who thought otherwise. Why? Aquinas's view, which is friendlier to reason, may for that very reason be unfriendlier to philosophy: the philosopher's pursuit of self-knowledge is as encouraged by the most radical challenge as it is discouraged by half-hearted harmonizations.

Consider, in this connection, an argument found in another essay by Strauss, "Progress or Return?"

> The revealed law is either fully rational—in that case it is a product of reason—or it is not fully rational—in that case it may as well be the product of human unreason as of divine super-reason. Still more generally, revelation is either a brute fact, to which nothing in purely human experience corresponds—in that case it is an oddity of no human importance—or it is a meaningful fact, a fact required by human experience to solve the fundamental problems of man.... It would then appear that it is impossible for reason, for philosophy, to assent to revelation as revelation.

This kind of reasoning may explain why Strauss does not spend more time on the Catholic view.



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It would also mean that the most tenable position on behalf of revelation would be the most absurd one, though not so absurd as to become an "oddity of no human importance." As Strauss writes, "[t]o *exclude* the possibility of refutation [of revelation], there is only one way: that faith has no basis whatever in human knowledge of actual things. This view of faith is not the Jewish and the Catholic one." In other words, the Jewish and Catholic view (the more reasonable view) *cannot* exclude the possibility of a refutation of revelation.

Strauss's approach to the possibility of revelation—what he calls the approach of "the Greek philosopher"—involves a close examination of the moral presuppositions of the Jewish and Christian revelations, through which Strauss uncovers the central importance of morality for revelation. This belief in the importance of morality is what Strauss calls "the basic fallacy of faith." He then proceeds, as Meier shows, to defend the possibility that philosophy is trans-moral and that the philosopher sees morality as "not something valuable in itself."

But even supposing Strauss is right that the idea of morality implied in the Bible and in belief in the biblical God is unintelligible, does this not leave intact Luther's or Kierkegaard's absurdist theology? After all, Strauss's conclusion rests on an examination of the humanly intelligible elements of revelation and belief in revelation. In "Progress or Return," Strauss writes: "God's ways may seem to be foolish to man; this does not mean that they are foolish. Natural theology would have to get rid, in other words, of God's incomprehensibility in order to refute revelation, and that it has never done." A "most serious difficulty" for "natural theology," he writes, is that God "may be said to be *inscrutable*." Or as he puts it in his commentary on the *Euthyphro*, "Is one not bound to contradict oneself when trying to communicate the incommunicable?"

WHILE GOD'S UNFATHOMABLE character is something a sincere believer may well accept, Strauss invites us, in focusing on the importance of "the moral criterion" for revelation, to ask whether a sincere believer could also accept that the notions of justice and goodness taught by the Bible are fundamentally mysterious. According to Strauss, Luther himself considered it to be "an indubitable fact" that every human being "experiences something of the reality of God" in his moral conscience. The philosopher would deny that.

Meier makes many striking claims in this book. But the most striking, especially when juxtaposed, come from Strauss's own hand:

> A philosophy which believes that it can refute the possibility of revelation—and a philosophy which does not believe that: *this* is the real meaning of *la querelle des anciens et des modernes*.

And:

> [The] [p]ossibility of refutation of revelation [is] implied in Platonic-Aristotelian philosophy.

This excellent book, for which everyone interested in Strauss and the theologico-political problem should be grateful, helps us ponder these claims. And, in part through its austere precision, it reinforces Strauss's remark that, however familiar one may become with the arguments adumbrated in the book, "refutations are cheap and usually not worth the paper on which they are written" unless they result in a fundamental change in orientation, a "liberation."

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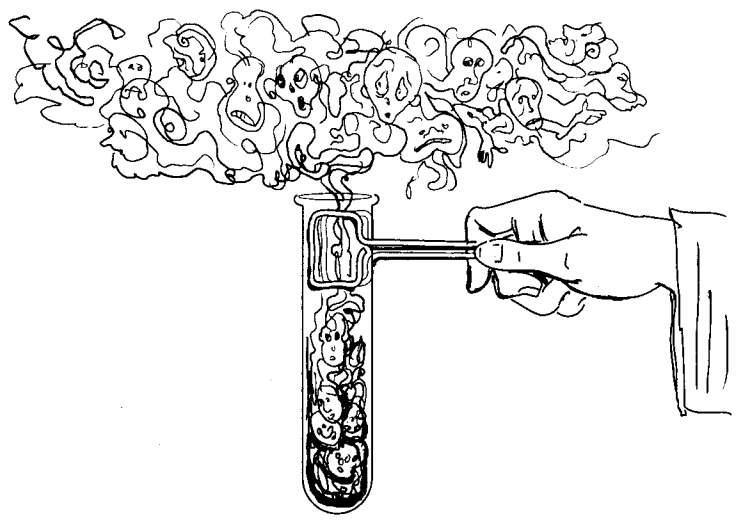
Book Review by Ramesh Ponnuru

# Unnatural Acts

*Challenging Nature: The Clash of Science and Spirituality at the New Frontiers of Life,*
by Lee M. Silver. Ecco, 464 pages, $26.95



Toward the beginning of *Challenging Nature,* Lee Silver sounds a defensive note: "I do not claim that all expressions of spirituality are harmful or bad. Nor do I think that all biotech applications are inherently good, ethical, or risk-free." It was wise of the Princeton molecular biologist to include those two sentences. The reader might otherwise have been misled by every other sentence in the book into thinking that Silver considers religion a regrettable—though regrettably ineradicable—feature of human society, and that no serious limits should be placed on biotechnology.

Silver contends that our debates over biotechnology are distorted by irrational religious beliefs—and, worse, by the failure of participants in the debate to come clean about those beliefs: "Catholic and evangelical Christians strive to appear rational and scientific in their opposition to embryo research." At the same time, behind environmentalists' advocacy of "natural" food and medicine lies a nature-worship that they have concealed even from themselves. Silver's book does not address these people directly. "Although fundamentalist faith-based extremists from the right and left will probably remain beyond engagement," he writes, "their stealth extremism can be revealed to everyone else."

Silver's argument that religious fundamentalists conceal their true beliefs proceeds along two tracks. On one of them, he notes that many of the people who make secular-sounding arguments are in fact religious. He seems to think that such people are being deceptive whenever they make their arguments without disclosing their religious commitments. Were this standard applied evenhandedly, Silver would be unable to write an op-ed on biotechnological issues without mentioning up front that he is an "extremely skeptical agnostic deist" (as he describes himself in an endnote), and his arguments could be dismissed as a product of his theology. The only way to avoid that conclusion would be to assume that religious people are less rational, or less honest, than the irreligious (and the agnostic deists). Silver may take this view; he refers casually at one point to "mystics, religionists, spiritualists, and other charlatans." But the assumption is not obviously true, and Silver provides no reasons for believing it.

The President's Council on Bioethics, chaired by Leon Kass through 2005 and currently headed by Edmund Pellegrino, especially exercises Silver. He considers a majority of its members to hold "extreme" views borrowed from the Judeo-Christian tradition. It is hard to know what to make of this charge. Although Silver does not mention it, only a minority of the council favors a ban on cloning, which arguably puts it to the left of the population at large. And by any reasonable standard, being influenced by Judaism and Christianity does not make one an extremist. That Silver thinks it does may say more about him than about his targets.

He does real injustice to council member Diana Schaub. Twice he truncates a quote of hers to make it sound as though she were saying that research that destroys embryos is morally worse than slavery. The full quote, presented only in an endnote, makes it clear that all she is saying is that defenders of the embryo have available to them an argument that defenders of the slave did not: namely, that all of us once were embryos. (Obviously, not all of us once were slaves.)

On the second track, Silver claims that religious believers' secular-sounding arguments are so clearly defective that they must be camouflage for undisclosed theological concerns. If the arguments really were defective, then the demonstration of hidden motives would be superfluous. But he does not refute the arguments, let alone prove that they are made in bad faith.

Silver himself makes several *reductio ad absurdum* arguments: for example, his idea is that those who think a human embryo is a human being with moral worth should think the same of all living human cells, since they too are alive and genetically human. Oddly, he sees no difference between a whole organism and a part of one. But pro-lifers need not join him in regarding embryonic stem cells as equivalent to the human embryos used to produce them. Scientists may be able to create embryos by manipulating certain cells or combining them with other biological entities; but this possibility does not mean those cells should be treated as though they are already embryos before the scientists



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touch them, as Silver also thinks. Tumors that are made up of living human cells are also not organisms—again, a distinction he misses.

The phenomenon of twinning poses a problem, in Silver's mind, for pro-lifers: how can an embryo be held to be an individual human being if it can split into two embryos? To see his way out of this problem, he should consider his own advocacy of cloning human embryos for research and therapeutic uses. The goal is to treat a patient by taking one of his cells and using it to create an embryo that is genetically his identical twin. If this procedure were done on a patient, it would not call into question his own status as an individual human being with a right not to be killed. The fact that a twin human embryo can be spontaneously created from an embryo shouldn't call its status into question, either.

The proposition that a human embryo is a human being, Silver complains, is unscientific because it is non-falsifiable. It is true that truisms aren't falsifiable; but unless science can proceed without definitions, it will have to live with them. Silver trips over properties of logic more than once. He spends a lot of time on Princeton philosopher Robert P. George's claim that "[a] thing either is or is not a whole human being." He takes George to be denying the possibility that scientists could create a being that was, say, partly human and partly chimp. It is a mistaken conclusion, but one that hints at a radicalism that Silver is himself concealing.

At a few points in the book, he mentions—always with seeming approval, but never with explicit endorsement—the views of Peter Singer (who blurbed the book). Singer notoriously holds that an organism's mere possession of biological humanity confers no worth on it. Non-human animals with an awareness of their own existence over time may have worth, while humans without it—fetuses and newborns, for example, or adults in a "persistent vegetative state"—may not. On this view, human rights do not, strictly speaking, exist. (Imagining that they do constitutes "speciesism": a neologism of Singer's that is barbarous in more than one sense of the word.)

Silver goes Singer one better: he seems to deny that *human beings* exist. Evolutionary theory debunks the notion that there are clear boundaries between species. There are only populations with overlapping traits that we classify together for convenience. When we start creating human/non-human hybrids, Silver writes, we will have to draw "arbitrary" lines to determine which ones will have rights. He breezily approves the prospect.

In one of his book's more baffling passages, Silver argues—well, let him speak for himself:

> The Darwinian idea of continuous evolution leads logically to a parallel developmental perspective in which an embryo begins as a single-cell nonhuman being that morphs through a fuzzy partial human being stage, and then morphs into a newborn baby. If no nonarbitrary starting point exists for human beingness during evolution, then no nonarbitrary starting point need exist during embryo development either. The only basis for rejecting this argument is religious—the traditional Christian belief in an indivisible, absolute, unchanging human soul.

The only basis? Silver leaves out the possibility that an agnostic could dislike non sequiturs. (And what's an "absolute" soul, by the way?)

One answer to Silver's challenge is obvious: just as the existence of dusk does not eliminate the difference between night and day, the fact that hybrids—or evolutionary precursors of human beings—pose difficult problems of classification does not prove, or even suggest, that it is difficult to classify a human embryo as human. The Reverend Nicanor Pier Giorgio Austriaco has provided a deeper answer:

> [T]he biological species concept "works." It allows one biologist in Russia to do an experiment with his mouse of the species *Mus musculus*, while expecting to reproduce the results of another scientist in Singapore who had done her experiments with another mouse of the same species. But *why* does the species concept work? Why do the two scientists get the same results? Biological essentialism provides an answer where nominalism cannot—the biological species concept works because members of the same species actually do share a common essence that behaves in a reproducible manner when it is manipulated in the same way. Biological essentialism makes the biological task intelligible.

Many of Silver's quarrels with evangelical and Catholic conservatives display a weak grasp of the material. Lifenews.com is not part of the "evangelical press." The Catholic Church did not reach the conclusion that embryos should be protected from conception onward because of a belief that sperm were tiny human beings. The view that embryos have "a rational nature" is not "equivalent to saying that a single cell can think on its own and make sensible choices about its future life." The word "goods" is not "a term used uniquely by adherents of natural law." Pro-lifers have no ambition to deny other people's rights "not to hold a Christian belief in the ensoulment of an early embryo"; they merely deny that people have a right to kill embryos on the basis of their beliefs. The proposed ban on cloning would not make it a crime to go overseas to get medical treatments based on cloning and then return to the U.S. The congressman who introduced that bill is named David, not Joseph, Weldon. And so, alas, on.

Silver is surely right that environmentalists confuse "natural" with good when it comes, for example, to the chemicals we encounter in everyday life. But does this confusion really prove that environmentalists are post-Christian nature-worshippers? Silver holds that natural law theorists are also guilty of identifying the good with the natural in a biological sense; but his analysis does not inspire confidence that he has dealt fairly with their arguments.

It was once popular to speak of "the two cultures." In the one were the scientists, who knew little of the humanities; and in the other were the humanists, who knew little of the sciences. Lee Silver belongs to the first camp. He is an accomplished scientist, and his book is not without some interesting trivia. I had not known, for instance, that almost none of the molecules that compose a human body are still there a month later. Silver is at his best when he is teaching biology. The results are far less edifying when he commits philosophy, especially when he seems unaware that he is doing so.

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Book Review by Richard Vedder

# Made in America

*Blessed Among Nations: How the World Made America*, by Eric Rauchway.
Hill and Wang, 256 pages, $24

Rising college enrollments and falling teaching loads have led to an explosion in the number of college faculty writing books over the past two generations, and I wonder whether, as a consequence, we are doing *too* much research on some topics. Every young professor who rehashes old issues has to find a new angle to distinguish his work from that of predecessors, and as the number doing this grows, the new angles grow ever more distant from facts and reality. Young historians in particular latch on to trendy scholarly preoccupations and try to retrofit the past to satisfy the intellectual fixation *du jour*.

Eric Rauchway's *Blessed Among Nations: How the World Made America* provides a fresh occasion for these musings. After reading the blurbs on the back cover, "tour de force," "brilliant and convincing," etc., I eagerly started devouring this fairly slim volume. I must say, however, that I found its thesis neither brilliant nor convincing, in large part because it is woven from meager and misunderstood data.

Rauchway, a history professor at the University of California at Davis, argues that the first wave of world globalization between 1865 and 1914 helped to make America exceptional relative to the advanced nations of Europe, particularly with regard to America's stubborn unwillingness to embrace the modern welfare state. The premise suffers first from a critically important problem—there is little empirical evidence that there was any significant move towards "globalization" in this period, at least as it applies to the United States. Rauchway looks at two dimensions of globalization: capital investments of other nations in the United States, and immigration flows into this country. Fair enough, but I would add a third good globalization measure: international trade as a percent of national output.

I looked at all three of these measures of globalization, comparing the antebellum era (say, 1820 to 1860) with the period between 1860 and the beginning of World War I, the era that Rauchway considers the first wave of globalization. First, with respect to international capital investments in the United States, I quote from *International Capital Markets and American Economic Growth, 1820-1914*, the definitive work of Lance Davis and Robert Cull: "Overall, between 1790 and 1900 the ratio of foreign capital imports to new national capital formation was almost five percent, and, over the last three decades of the century, it was about four-fifths of that amount." In short, foreign investments played a relatively small role in financing U.S. capital formation, and that role was *less* in the late 19th century than it was earlier. Davis and Cull find, for example, that foreign investment played a far larger role in financing American investment between 1816 and 1840 than at any time in the late 19th century.

What about immigration? From 1820 to 1860, the proportion of American residents who were immigrants rose from surely less than 5% of the population (the Census did not measure foreign born in 1820) to about 13%, whereas from 1860 to 1910 it rose only very modestly, to somewhat over 14%. The big surge in immigrant presence came before the Civil War. In the peak pre-Civil War year for new immigrants (1854), 17.3 newcomers entered for every 1,000 Americans, far more than the 13.9 figure in the peak year (1907) in the later period.

When people think of "globalization" today, I believe they look at international trade, particularly imports and exports. Was there an upsurge in U.S. international trade relative to overall economic activity in the era Rauchway considers the first wave of globalization? Emphatically, no. I compared imports as a percent of estimated total output in the years 1856 to 1860 (the end of the antebellum era), with 1910 to 1914 (the period that Rauchway emphasizes). As I calculate it, the trade sector is 15.8% of total output in the 1850s, versus 10.6% in the 1910s. International trade declined, and rather sharply, in some relative sense.

In short, the postbellum period in American economic history was one of rapid growth of a vast domestic market with only minimal impact from foreign influences. Indeed, this era of isolationist foreign policy and high tariffs was also one of relative economic isolation, a period in which the international influences, while growing in some absolute sense, were actually stagnant or declining relative to the economy as a whole.

If that were not enough, on the basis of admittedly cursory research I am not even persuaded that America was very exceptional relative to Europe with regard to the welfare state, at least until much later in history. It is true that Bismarck started Germany on the way to a welfare state in the 1880s and 1890s, but its massive manifestation around Europe comes much later. In Britain, the first big moves (e.g., unemployment insurance) come only shortly before World War I, just two decades before similar moves in the U.S. during the New Deal. Central government expenditures were well under 10% of total output in 1910 in such European nations as Germany, France, Britain, and Denmark. While they were only about 3% in the U.S., when state and local spending is taken into account I doubt the European totals are dramatically different from the American ones.

While there are differences with regard to health provision and the nationalization of industry, a pretty good case can be made that the American and European governmental experiences are not radically different before 1970. For example, compare the U.S. and the four largest West European nations (Britain, France, Germany, and Italy). In 1970, taxes as a percent of GDP ranged from 27.9% in Italy to 37.5% in Britain, with the U.S. total (30.1%, counting state and local government, too) being a bit below the European average, but not dramatically. Fast forward to 2003. The four European nations had tax burdens ranging from 39.9 to 45.8% of GDP, rising more than 10 percentage points on average since 1970. The U.S. burden (31.0%) was markedly lower than any of these European countries and had shown little change since 1970. The comprehensive European welfare state comes after 1945 or even 1970, even though its antecedents were earlier (as was the case in the U.S., too). Certainly the differential between Europe and the U.S. sharply expanded after 1970, far more so than in the 1870 to 1914 era.

If I were trying to build a case relating globalization to the differential growth in the welfare state, then, I would do it using the modern period, where both globalization and the welfare state differential grew dramatically, not some 100 years earlier when neither was grow-



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ing much, at least with reference to the U.S. But frankly, I think the roots of American exceptionalism lie elsewhere.

Rauchway's book abounds in unsubstantiated hyperbole. Speaking of "constituencies left out of, or lost in, the modern global economy," he claims that "they wanted government to regulate the effects of foreign capital and foreign labor, and little else." Rauchway believes that foreign capital led to a massive westward movement of native born Americans (never mind inconvenient Census data showing that the movement westward was actually slightly greater *before* the Civil War than in this alleged era of globalization). He further believes tensions between immigrants (a product of globalization) and natives contributed to worker distress in the East, accelerating the westward movement, and that foreign (largely British) capital financed the railroads that made movement westward cheap and convenient. Unfortunately, the evidence supporting these claims is not impressive.

He suggests that the 1920-21 downturn might have been avoided "had the nation retained...some of the regulatory and information-gathering agencies that grew so swiftly during the war...." Again, this is sheer speculation. My own rather more exhaustive research of this downturn (with Lowell Gallaway) suggests that the huge postwar inflation followed by deflation caused resource prices to temporarily get out of equilibrium, and that government *inaction* allowed markets to rapidly adjust in a way that made the downturn smaller both in severity and duration than it otherwise would have been. Rauchway's lament about the lack of information-gathering after World War I ignores the reality of Secretary of Commerce Hoover's activism in this area, e.g., the creation of the *Survey of Current Business*.

To me, the traditional story of American exceptionalism, with perhaps a bit of a new twist, is far more satisfying and consistent with the facts. Americans were a hardy breed whose success in life depended on conquering the frontier and creatively adjusting to the realities of a new physical environment. This put a premium on individual, not collective, solutions to problems. The American entrepreneurial spirit grew out of this reality. Books like Harold Evans and colleagues' *They Made America* (2004) or Carl Schramm's *The Entrepreneurial Imperative* (2006), along with a reading of Frederick Jackson Turner's original statement of the frontier thesis (or, for that matter, Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*), will give readers a far better understanding of how America has truly differentiated itself and outshone the world economically than this misleading account of "how the world made America."

*Richard Vedder is a visiting scholar at the American Enterprise Institute and distinguished professor of Economics at Ohio University. His latest book, with Wendell Cox, is* The Wal-Mart Revolution *(AEI Press).*

Book Review by Peter C. Myers

# Up from Victimhood

*Enough: The Phony Leaders, Dead-End Movements, and Culture of Failure That Are Undermining Black America —and What We Can Do About It*, by Juan Williams. Crown Publishers, 256 pages, $25

*Winning the Race: Beyond the Crisis in Black America*, by John McWhorter. Gotham Books, 352 pages, $27.50 (cloth), $15 (paper)

*White Guilt: How Blacks and Whites Together Destroyed the Promise of the Civil Rights Era*, by Shelby Steele. HarperCollins, 192 pages, $24.95

Bill Cosby has played many roles in movies and television. It was still a surprise, though, when he cast himself as moral critic at the NAACP celebration of the 50th anniversary of the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. Cosby told his audience that "lower economic" blacks are not "holding their end in this deal" with the civil rights heroes from the 1950s and '60s, who "opened the doors" and "gave us the right." "I'm talking about these people who cry when their son is standing there in an orange suit," he said. "Where were you when he was two? Where were you when he was twelve? Where were you when he was eighteen, and how come you don't know he had a pistol? And where is his father, and why don't you know where he is? And why doesn't the father show up to talk to this boy?"

One sentence from his remarks explains why Cosby ignited a political controversy: "We cannot blame white people." According to an article on the Black Commentator website, "'Personal responsibility' is a code for what people are told to exercise when the state refuses to see to the general welfare of its non-rich citizens." Another critic wrote that Cosby "delighted many white Americans" by confirming "their own self-satisfied opinion that poor African-Americans have nothing and nobody but themselves to blame for their difficult circumstances." The University of Pennsylvania's Michael Eric Dyson wrote *Is Bill Cosby Right?* (2005), an entire book disputing the speech.

According to *Enough*, by Juan Williams, Bill Cosby *is* right—and every black American knows it. Cosby is right to label destructive personal behavior as the principal factor perpetuating black poverty. He's right to criticize civil rights leaders who disdain any discussion of black crime or poverty unless it concentrates on white racism. And he's right to insist that the civil rights tradition calls for blacks to take advantage of every opportunity America affords, not to perpetually nurse grievances and exert moral leverage by fixating on their own victimization.

Williams is familiar to conservatives as a political analyst for Fox News, and to liberals as a correspondent for National Public Radio. His book, like Cosby's speech itself, suggests that the politics of personal responsibility is gaining traction among blacks who don't identify themselves as conservatives. But we must still turn to blacks who do, such as John McWhorter and



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Shelby Steele, for the most persuasive expressions of that viewpoint.

In *Winning the Race*, John McWhorter, a senior fellow at the Manhattan Institute, argues against the dominant view of the black political class that "black America's problem is white people." It is a framework, he claims, that is wholly inadequate to explain unprecedented social chaos among poor blacks during what is obviously the least racist period in American history. If A causes B, reducing A cannot increase B. If white racism explains why blacks can't adapt to a changing economy, form stable families and neighborhoods, resist the lure of narcotics, or take advantage of educational opportunities, these problems should all have been much worse before the 1950s than since. In fact, McWhorter shows that the co-existence of urban poverty and moral stability used to be the rule and became the exception only in the last half-century.

What went wrong? the Great Society did Great Damage, fostering idleness and illegitimacy, says McWhorter. The bigger problem is a subculture of alienation, embraced by the least, and the most, privileged blacks, which treats defiance as the defining quality of black authenticity. It disdains educational achievement and steady employment as "acting white," demands affirmative action policies as exemptions from universal standards of merit, and embraces popular culture that glorifies toxic attitudes—McWhorter describes rap as *"the most overtly and consistently misogynistic music ever produced in human history."*

How did an era of unprecedented opportunities lead to a culture so extravagantly contemptuous of them? McWhorter gives a Tocquevillian answer: freedom is frightening. The freedom to fashion the life you want carries with it the fear of having to take responsibility for how that life turns out. To relieve that fear, whites have created an enormous social-insurance state and, more recently, enveloped themselves in their own culture of complaint. Blacks, rendered doubly insecure by their history of subordination, take shelter in what McWhorter calls "therapeutic alienation." It consists of blaming whites, pretending the new opportunities are fraudulent, and responding to present obstacles as though gestures of defiance were the only real options.

Shelby Steele is a research fellow at the Hoover Institution, and a recipient of the Bradley Prize, conservatives' answer to the MacArthur Foundation's "genius grants." Not surprisingly, his argument in *White Guilt* is explicitly political. He argues that white guilt has become the defining feature of liberalism.

Whites who obey the constant pressure to demonstrate their lack of racism harm all Americans. They harm blacks by creating a political environment that discourages self-reliance. Blacks who succeed through initiative are dismissed as mere anomalies; those, like Clarence Thomas and Steele himself, who insist on self-reliance and race-neutral policies are reviled as ingrates by liberal paternalists. Guilt-ridden whites, absorbed in moral exhibitionism, are actively indifferent to the corrosive effects of their ministrations, especially on blacks. In preferring to dissociate themselves from racism instead of actually assisting African-Americans, they resemble those abolitionists who sought to dissociate themselves from a Union with slaveholders, at the cost of eliminating the only viable agency of slaves' liberation.

Among black and white liberals alike, a longstanding objection to conservatives' emphasis on black self-help has been that it entails letting whites off the hook. Steele contends that the insistence on white responsibility, far from keeping whites on the hook, actually gratifies and empowers them. Hungrily asserting their pervasive responsibility along with their pervasive guilt, white liberals find it irresistible to dehumanize blacks, treating them as perpetual sufferers and dependents. Today's white liberals embrace a morality that rests upon the presumption of white power, according to Steele. The Age of White Guilt signifies, in the end, only a peculiar extension of the Age of White Racism. Soft despotism is different from hard, but it is despotism nonetheless. And in many of its practical effects, it is not soft at all.

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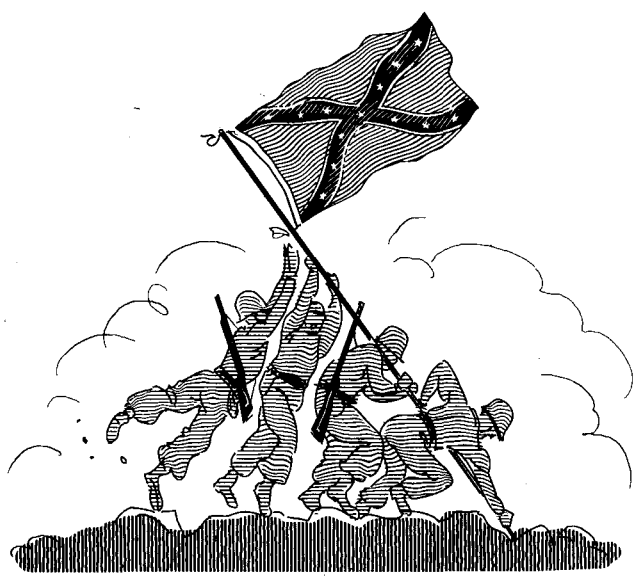
Book Review by Jeremy Rabkin

# Forging a Nation

*Nations, Markets, and War: Modern History and the American Civil War*, by Nicholas Onuf and Peter S. Onuf.
University of Virginia Press, 352 pages, $45



It has become one of the iconic images of the Second World War—those battle-weary Marines struggling to raise the Stars and Stripes atop the highest peak on Iwo Jima. On Okinawa, a few months later, a different Marine division, even more bloodied, drew inspiration from comrades who in the midst of the fighting raised another flag—the Stars and Bars of the Confederacy. Those Marines were mostly Southern boys, of course, but no less proud to be U.S. Marines. And they were not unusual in their mixed loyalties.

Only a few weeks earlier, in April 1945, American troops commanded by Virginia-born Matthew Ridgway had surrounded a German army in the Ruhr. To coax his German counterpart to surrender, General Ridgway sent a note reminding him that exactly 80 years before, a commander facing similar circumstances had chosen "an honorable capitulation." To drive home the point, Ridgway offered this characterization of the commander who established this precedent: "Neither history nor the military profession records any nobler character, any more brilliant master of warfare, any more dutiful subordinate of the state, than the American General, Robert E. Lee."

We should pause over Ridgway's remarkably complacent deployment of that phrase "dutiful subordinate of the state," and mark the honorific, "*American* General." These might seem particularly odd characterizations for the commander of a rebel army, and Ridgeway's German counterpart was not moved. Rather than "honorable capitulation," Field Marshall Model instructed his troops to try to escape as best they could. He made his own escape a few days later by blowing his brains out with his service revolver. He had a somewhat different sense of honor than Robert E. Lee.

Whatever it does for Europeans, we Americans remain fascinated by our Civil War. And with reason. It was the first war in which railroads, telegraphic communications, and industrial production in the rear allowed commanders to deploy large armies on short notice and keep them supplied for extended periods. The resulting battles were more like those waged in Europe in the world wars of the next century than like any battles of earlier times. More Americans died in the Civil War, in fact, than in both world wars put together.

Yet for all its intensity, the American Civil War did not generate massacres and atrocities against civilians on anything like the scale of domestic conflicts elsewhere, let alone on the scale of the world wars in Europe. The war mobilized popular resolve in a way that was then unprecedented, yet it left room for a kind of chivalry between rival commanders, or at least some notion of limits imposed by the soldier's honor.

Still, for all its elements of restraint, the Civil War, by the time it reached its climax, had changed the self-understanding of Americans on both sides of the conflict. Having denied at the outset that the Constitution authorized secession, the North ended by imposing military rule on the South, not to restore but to "reconstruct" Southern states before allowing them to participate again in national politics. Amendments to the Constitution abolishing slavery and providing general guarantees against deprivations of rights by the states made the national government, for the first time, the ultimate guarantor of citizens' rights. Meanwhile, the South, having rallied to the cause of states' rights, fought a war in which Southern nationalism often superseded the claims of the "sovereign" states. Yet in the long run, the memory of the war threaded Southern pride into the larger tapestry of American nationalism—as we can see from General Ridgway's appeal.

It would be a considerable overstatement to say that Nicholas and Peter Onuf, in their new book *Nations, Markets, and War*, have now offered us a clear explanation of how this came about. Focused argument is not one of the strong points of this volume. The subtitle, *Modern History and the American Civil War*, actually exaggerates the degree of focus here. After an initial 50 pages in which they talk about Aristotle and medieval Scholastics and the fathers of the Reformation—for reasons I could not follow—they settle down to another hundred pages of discourse on various aspects of "modern history." The book is half over before they finally get to the sectional conflicts in America that gave rise to the Civil War.

It may be that Nicholas, a professor of international relations at Florida International



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University, and Peter, a professor of American history at the University of Virginia, each felt he had to indulge his brother in some cherished digressions. The text is often learned and intelligent but it is not well digested. It invokes a variety of concepts and theories without taking the time to elucidate any of them with satisfying clarity. It nods at a whole series of historical developments without developing any narrative continuity of its own.

Yet the Onufs do, in the course of their rambling exposition, bring out some very central and important questions about the way the modern world understands itself and especially the way America has come to see itself. Their central concern is the ambiguous notion of national independence—a notion presupposing, in a somewhat paradoxical way, that the world is already organized along lines that make independence a recognized and reliable category.

We tend to take this idea for granted. It is in the Declaration of Independence, after all—that we are "among the powers of the earth" entitled by "the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God" to a "separate and equal station." But as the Onufs remind us, this doctrine of an international system made up of separate and equal states had been around (at least in published treatises) for only a few decades before the American Revolution, and it was by no means generally accepted in Europe even then. As they point out, the most widely recognized new text on the law of nations, in the period between the American Revolution and the American Civil War, was the work of an American—Henry Wheaton, who before his diplomatic career had been court reporter for John Marshall's Supreme Court.

One of the great issues in international politics in that era was the relative benefits to be gained from free trade. It was an issue that increasingly divided North and South in antebellum America. As the Onufs demonstrate, disputes about the tariff were also disputes about the fundamental character of international relations—and about the meaning of nationality, even in America itself.

Federalists and then Whigs, arguing for a protective tariff, often conceded that free trade was good for all participants. But mutually beneficial trade depended on peace, and the Atlantic was repeatedly closed to American trade during the long series of wars from the French Revolution to the final defeat of Napoleon. If it did not develop internal means of supply, warned tariff advocates, the American economy would be crippled in every new war—and wars, they argued, were bound to recur. Tariffs would not only reduce American dependence on foreign trade but help finance "internal improvements"—roads, canals, river and ocean ports—which would facilitate internal trade within the United States, where peace was assured by federal authority. Some of the tariff could also finance federal military spending, particularly on naval ships and coastal fortifications, to ensure that foreigners did not threaten America's internal peace.

Southerners, in arguing against the tariff, advanced a different view of the world. Trade would promote peace, they insisted, because European nations would not want to risk anything that threatened mutually beneficial trade relations with their American partners. Northern tariff advocates warned, in reply, that without more internal development of its own, the United States would be doomed to trade on unequal terms—subordinated, in effect, to terms imposed by an informal commercial empire still based in London. Southerners responded that a high tariff would subordinate Southern states to a commercial empire based in New York and Philadelphia. So, as writers in the North stoked nationalist fear of British domination, Southern pamphleteers promoted a regional identity rooted in fear of the North.

The idea of secession became plausible when its advocates could present it, not as the desperate recourse of one or two aggrieved states, but as the response of a whole region, large enough to form a powerful new nation in itself. What made it plausible to think all those states would respond in the same way was, of course, that they were all *slave* states. The Onufs do not minimize the importance of slavery—nor, as they make clear, did Southern writers at the time. On the eve of the Civil War, Southerners were no longer content to depict slavery as a regional economic interest entitled to protection. Instead, slavery was increasingly presented as the foundation of a superior way of life.

By the time the argument reached this extreme, with its glorification of racial mastery as a way of life, Southern nationalism might appear a kind of precursor of European fascism. Yet as the Onufs describe it, the antebellum Southern outlook still conceived itself to be grounded in Enlightenment rationalism and biblical Christianity. Southerners imagined that they were uplifting barbarous people through compulsory servitude—not asserting the will to power of the Southern race. They even imagined that Southern independence would be recognized by Europeans and strengthen trends toward a more peaceful world overall. They thought that slavery at home could be the basis of harmony and peace abroad.

Principally a work of intellectual history, *Nations, Markets, and War* never compares arguments pressed by regional advocates of that era with the more detached assessments that might now be offered by economic or diplomatic historians. And the book makes no effort to carry its story past the outbreak of war in 1861. But it does not require much specialized learning to see that history, even immediately following 1861, did not bear out the thinking of Southern advocates. Whether our experience since then bears out the alternative view—of national cohesion from international competition—is a more complicated question.

It says something that three generations later, an American officer corps drawn so heavily from the South was prepared to have the army's main battle tank named for General Sherman. (The "Lee tank" had not performed well in early battles in North Africa.) It says something, too, that the rest of the American military readily accepted Southern commanders and did not begrudge Southerners their regional pride. No one was punished for that Confederate flag-raising on Okinawa.

*Nations, Markets, and War* shows that, apart from economics and military success, perceptions of interest and identity play a large role in the building of nations. The defense of nations also has something to do with pride. We count on it without thinking about it, and it may not bear too much thought: it may be that it is, if not irrational, still, ultimately, mysterious.

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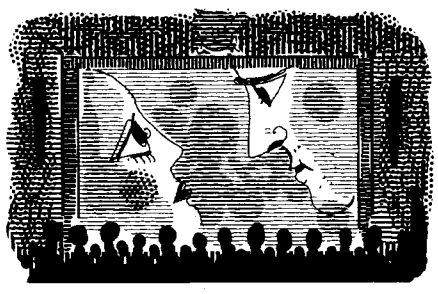
by Martha Bayles



# Cultural Learnings for Make Benefit Glorious Comedy of Sacha Baron Cohen

STROLLING ALONG THE THAMES LAST summer, I did something unusual for me: I paused to check out some street performers and stayed for the whole show. Two young men were performing in a series sponsored by the Royal National Theater, and though their act was mostly wordless clowning I stood transfixed by their skills. First they would single out someone and imitate his stance or gait (passing joggers were a specialty). Then, while the crowd was roaring with laughter, they would back away from their target, making elaborate gestures of apology but also blame toward each other ("*He* did it, not me") and toward the crowd ("*They* made us do it"). And invariably the victim would relent, playing the good sport to general applause.

Street comedians have operated this way since time immemorial—with reason. They must ruffle a few feathers in order to tickle the crowd's funny bone, but they must also know exactly how much feather-ruffling the traffic will bear. Great comedians ruffle deeply, almost to the point of pain, and provoke correspondingly deep, almost painful laughter. Yet the emphasis is on "almost." As Aristotle noted in the *Poetics*, "the laughable is an error or disgrace that does not involve pain or destruction." The line between funny and hurtful is fine but definitive.

The chief feather-ruffler in the world today is Sacha Baron Cohen, the 35-year-old British comedian best known for his hit film, *Borat: Cultural Learnings of America for Make Benefit Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan*. Baron Cohen plays Borat Sagdiyev, a clueless, feckless, tasteless TV reporter from "Kazakhstan" (no resemblance to the real country) who visits New York to make a documentary about America, but after seeing Pamela Anderson on *Baywatch* embarks on a cross-country journey to Los Angeles to meet the sexy star. The character's purpose is straightforward: to abduct Anderson by throwing an embroidered "Kazakh marriage sack" over her head. The comedian's purpose is more devious: to find ripe targets for his special brand of hit-and-run comedy.

## Ruthlessly Funny

THAT'S HIT-AND-RUN, NOT STREET comedy. Unlike the performers on the South Bank, Baron Cohen is merciless. His other comic persona, Ali G, the white British hip-hop wannabe host of HBO's *Da Ali G Show*, specializes in ambushing prominent people. A recent article in *Rolling Stone* described the process: "The interview requests come from a fake British production company.... And until just before the cameras roll, the interviewee is under the impression that the clean-cut, well-dressed director is going to do the interview and the baggy-clothed, wrap-around-shades-wearing character carrying equipment is just part of the crew."

Confronted with the bizarre-looking, patois-speaking Ali G, a few guests (Pat Buchanan, INS chief James Ziegler) keep their cool. But most (Donald Trump, Newt Gingrich, Ralph Nader) totally lose it when Ali G asks one of his incredibly dumb questions—to astronaut Buzz Aldrin: "Wot's it like, walkin' on da sun?"—then interrupts the reply with a blue streak of vulgarity. When a guest bristles, Ali G does likewise, demanding to know, against all visible evidence, "Why da aggro, geezer? Is it coz I black?" And woe to the good sport: the more cheerfully a guest plays along, the more gleefully Ali G slays him.

Borat's targets are not celebrities, but the process was similar. First, they were invited to participate in a news documentary for Belarus TV (one unknown country being much like another). Then they signed a release, indemnifying Baron Cohen against any claim of "false light (allegedly false or misleading portrayal of Participant)" or "fraud (alleged deception or surprise about the Film)." And finally they bared their unwary good nature to Borat's swift "gotcha."

Don't get me wrong. Both Ali G and Borat can be wildly funny—for example, when Borat bops up to strangers in midtown Manhattan, kissing the men on both cheeks and crowing, "Hi! I Borat! I new in town! I want be your friend!" Some curse, some flee, some—like the passengers in the subway car where Borat's suitcase opens and live chickens flutter out—just laugh. As far as I know, none of these New Yorkers has filed a lawsuit. The lawsuits (about a dozen) and complaints have come from remoter places, such as Helena, Alabama (about which more below), and, at the extreme, Glod, the Roma (gypsy) village in Romania whose residents mugged for the camera as Borat's benighted kith and kin. This is not just because New Yorkers are more used to bizarre behavior. It's also because the farther Baron Cohen went into darkest America, the harder he worked at outing the savages.

David Brooks has criticized Baron Cohen for "snobbery"; others have defended his bold exposure of racism, sexism, anti-Semitism, and homophobia. He did turn up some unsightly prejudices: a trio of drunken frat boys make puerile comments about women and minorities; a rodeo manager in Tennessee advises Borat to shave off his mustache so he won't look Muslim, then jokingly agrees that homosexuals should be persecuted. But the question is, compared to what? Would a road trip through Europe, the Midde East, or any other part of the world yield a bigger crop of tolerance? Granted, Borat finds reinforcements for his caricatured bigotry. But most of the Americans he meets put up with all sorts of nonsense from this weird foreigner,



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doubtless because they assume (based on their history) that he is just another immigrant seeking to become "Americanized."

Surely this is the real message of the much discussed episode in which a group of genteel white folk in Helena, Alabama, host Borat in their dining club, only to have him (in his fractured English) call a "retired" man a "retard," insult a minister's wife for being less attractive than two other women, and return to the table after a trip to the bathroom brandishing a plastic bag full of his own feces (which prompts a patient lesson on how to use the toilet). The last straw is when Borat telephones for a hooker, and when one arrives, introduces her as his guest. The pair are summarily ejected, and because the hooker is black, the scene is widely cited as evidence of racism. Give me a break. Or as Ali G might say, *Wot is yooz bangin' on about?*

Lawsuits and controversy are good publicity, of course. But Baron Cohen's turbo-boosted fame presents a more daunting challenge. In January he sold his next "mockumentary," *Bruno*, to Universal Studios for $42.5 million. Bruno is his third comic persona, a flamingly gay fashion reporter for Austrian TV, who gives new meaning to the term "air head." So this new project promises to stimulate the chattering-blogging classes: *Is he really homophobic, or is he outing the homophobes? Post your comments below.* But how on earth is Baron Cohen going to pull off another round of hit-and-run comedy? Of the potential marks most likely to see him coming, surely gay fashionistas top the list.

## The Limits of Comedy

THUS THE SUPERSTAR COMEDIAN FACES the same problem as the humble street comedian: how do you make fun of others when you're outnumbered—and surrounded? It's nice to prattle on about comedy being anarchic and unbounded, but it almost never is, because like all things human, comedy is social—and political. This is not to saddle it with social or political "messages." The only way comedy can deliver a message is negatively, through satire. In his excellent book, *Redeeming Laughter* (1997), Peter Berger finds "satirical elements"—aggressive impulses, glints of malice—in all forms of comedy. But only in satire, which he defines as "the comic used in attacks that are part of *an agenda*," are these elements "welded together into the shaping of a weapon."

Here arises the vexed topic of anti-Semitism, an obsession in *Borat*. Borat's fellow villagers are depicted not only as whores, abortionists, animal rapists, and assorted cretins, but also as anti-Semites cheering at their annual "Running of the Jew," a Pamplona-style event with *papier-maché* effigies of Jews instead of bulls. In a bed-and-breakfast in the American South, Borat and his producer panic when they learn that the meek proprietors are Jewish. And the joke is on the dim-witted gun dealer who, when asked by Borat, "What is the best gun to defend from a Jew?" blandly recommends a .45. An observant Jew whose mother comes from Israel, who lived on a kibbutz, and who wrote his Cambridge history thesis about the role of Jews in the American civil rights movement, Baron Cohen rarely plays "gotcha" with his co-religionists (or with African Americans). As he explained in a recent interview, "Borat essentially works as a tool. By himself being anti-Semitic, he lets people lower their guard and expose their own prejudice."

Very high-minded, I'm sure. There's a lot of anti-Semitism in the world today; why shouldn't a gifted comedian satirize it? I can think of no good reason except a practical one: Baron Cohen's anti-anti-Semitic jokes are not very funny. And, in a curious way, they are not very Jewish. If he'd written a thesis about the role of Jews in American humor, then perhaps he would have learned that the best ethnic comedy is that in which people laugh as hard at themselves as they do at others.

This lesson comes from vaudeville, the popular theater that flourished between the end of the Civil War and the Depression. Vaudeville was big business, with impresarios booking acts in New York and sending them out on the national "circuit." To stay in the black, they had to "keep it clean." But that didn't make vaudeville timid or safe. Quite the opposite: it was rife with irreverent humor about the dominant social reality of the time, immigration. Between the 1880s and the 1920s, America absorbed 33 million newcomers from Europe, as well as 200,000 from China. The latter were subject to racist legal sanctions, as were blacks and Indians. But several European groups, especially Irish, Slavs, and Jews, also met with prejudice, both from the mainstream and from one another. So vaudeville traded in heavy-handed stereotypes: the drunken, belligerent Irishman; the volatile, irresponsible Italian; the stodgy, thick German; the clever, grasping Jew.

Yet this is precisely where the Jews made their mark. As Berger notes, turn-of-the-century Jewish immigrants to America brought with them a sophisticated comic culture, rooted in the Yiddish-speaking *shtetls* of Eastern Europe and, after emancipation, refined in the coffeehouses of Budapest, Prague, and Vienna. Two qualities made this culture an excellent fit for America: first, it did not need to be "kept clean" because it contained "almost no scatology and remarkably little sexuality"; and second, it was already capable of reaching beyond the group. Writing about the coffeehouse culture, Berger notes that "insiders and outsiders were no longer identified only in terms of ethnicity and religion." Then he adds: "It was in America that large numbers of gentiles have been drawn into the magic world of Jewish humor."

Vaudevillians were not social workers, needless to say. They were fierce competitors, vying for dollars and applause. But as noted by Edward Rothstein, a critic for the *New York Times*, their rough-and-tumble yielded a rare social alchemy:

> Irish, German and Yiddish accents were part of the patois of vaudevillian comedy, the mangled sentences echoing the increasingly familiar immigrant sounds of cities like New York. Oddly, though, these exaggerations were not generally an occasion for bigotry or hostility. There was an element of celebration in the mockery, partly because the actors were often themselves from these groups. Even stranger, ethnic actors would adopt alien ethnic identities for the sake of the comedy, making the artifice even more apparent. Blacks appeared as Chinese, Jews as Irish. It was as if, by some unspoken agreement, marginal groups had joined forces in displaying, to each other, the comic absurdity of their position.

## Ethnic Jokes

THIS DISTINCTIVE STYLE OF ETHNIC humor shaped radio, Hollywood movies, and TV—right into the 1970s, when, remarkably, it dominated *Saturday Night Live*. In the '70s America was beginning to experience another great wave of immigration, and the topic pervaded that legendary NBC show from the premier segment, which opened with a sketch about an ESL instructor (Michael O'Donoghue) teaching an immigrant (John Belushi) the ever-so-useful English sentence, "I would like to feed your fingertips to the wolverines." When the instructor keeled over with a heart attack, the docile pupil did the same. Immigration also drove such running gags as the terminally uncool "wild and crazy guys" from Eastern Europe; the limited-menu diner ("Cheeseburger, cheeseburger, Pepsi, Pepsi"); Belushi's Samurai hotel clerk; Gilda Radner's linguistically perplexed Emily Litella (reportedly based on a Puerto Rican custodian in Rockefeller Center); and Don Novello's tactless Father Guido Sarducci. With a stretch, one might also include those poorly assimilated aliens, the Coneheads ("We are from France"). In this respect, *Saturday Night Live* was pure vaudeville.



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Baron Cohen has never said so, but Borat's obvious predecessor is Latka Gravas, the befuddled "Foreign Man" created by Andy Kaufman and showcased on *Saturday Night Live* and the ABC sitcom, *Taxi*. Because these shows were network, not cable, Kaufman had to "keep it clean"—and he apparently chafed at that. But significantly, Kaufman seems not to have chafed at making Latka's country of origin entirely fictional—an island in the Caspian Sea called Caspiar. On the contrary, having invented Lakta's quaint customs and peculiar beliefs out of whole cloth, Kaufman could riff on them all the more cleverly.

Why couldn't Baron Cohen do this? Along with a great many Kazakh bloggers, I've been wondering why *Borat* used the name of a real country but then refused to satirize it outright, offering instead a hilarious but safe caricature of rural life in Soviet Russia. (Full disclosure: I laughed so hard at the Kazakh national anthem played at the end, they almost had to carry me out of the theater. The lyrics include, "Kazakhstan, home of Tinshein swimming pool, its length thirty meter and width six meter. / Filtration system a marvel to behold, it remove 80 percent of human solid waste.") Could it be that Baron Cohen itched to stick it to Muslims for being anti-Semitic but did not itch to share the fate of Salman Rushdie or (worse) Theo van Gogh, so he decided to pick on a majority-Muslim country that (in his own words) "no one had heard anything about"? *Borat* is full of in-jokes, not least its use of Hebrew as a stand-in for Kazakh. But the biggest in-joke of all may be its bait-and-switch treatment of Kazakhstan.

A friend of mine, a Central Asian expert, worries that *Borat's* "portrayal of Kazakhs as ignorant, misogynist, prejudiced fools" might "feed existing prejudices against backward natives, especially Muslim ones." I told him to chill: in America, the vast majority of *Borat* fans can't even pronounce Kazakhstan, much less find it on a map. And they learned nothing about its religious demographics from *Borat*. According to the film, the state religion is anti-Semitism, and then, after Borat's return, a form of Christianity in which peasants stick pitchforks into a sorry-looking compatriot on a cross. In the entire film, there's only one reference to Islam, and that's when the rodeo manager asks Borat if he is Muslim. The cryptic reply: "No, I am Kazakh. I follow the hawk."

Actually, from an American perspective, Baron Cohen is less vaudevillian than minstrel. I refer, of course, to the blackface entertainment that preceded vaudeville in the 19th century. Performed by whites before the Civil War and largely by blacks afterward, minstrelsy featured grotesque costumes (blacks and whites alike smeared their faces with burnt cork); sexual and scatological humor (depending on the audience); and stock figures (Jim Crow and Zip Coon) who were "low" in both senses: in status, because as slaves or servants they had no hope of upward mobility, and in moral character, because (like all caste societies) the slave South operated on the presumption that virtue resided at the top and vice at the bottom.

Baron Cohen's comic personae do not wear burnt cork, but there's plenty of it in their speech, dress, and general ineptitude. His use of slapstick and obscenity both to ridicule himself and to explode the pretensions of the hoity-toity resembles not just minstrelsy but also the Old Comedy of ancient Athens, which grew out of the *komos*, a ritual practiced on festival occasions by family, religious, and military groups for the purpose of settling scores with rival groups and prominent figures. Speaking as a college professor, it's always a pleasure to watch the language of Aristophanes curl the hair of undergraduates. Which is, of course, its function: to reveal the unsightly and disgraceful side of human nature, and to demonstrate that the high and mighty are not immune.

But here's a point worth pondering: Old Comedy was the product of a small society with fixed status levels and a shared moral code, performed as part of a public religious ritual, the annual festival of Dionysus. Its obscenity may shock genteel Americans, but according to classicist Jeffrey Henderson, "the comic poets did not...enjoy complete license to say anything they pleased." As for the performance setting, that was a live issue for Aristotle, who argued in the *Politics* that the most abusive and slanderous comedy should be placed off limits to women, youth, and others considered incapable of resisting its presumed negative effects.

No such limits are possible on the distribution of Baron Cohen's performances, needless to say. Now that *Borat* is on DVD, it is available in every nook, cranny, and media platform on the planet. This has not escaped the artist's notice, I am sure. But as he adjusts to the fact that his global celebrity is going to put a kink in his hit-and-run M.O., perhaps he should consider a different path. Classic gross-out comedy works well when performed by servants and slaves at the expense of their social "betters." But it is less appealing when performed by elite-educated pranksters at the expense of ordinary citizens. Immigrant New York was never a level playing field, to be sure. But it is arguable that the equal-opportunity insult humor of the great vaudevillians helped to keep it from becoming a war zone. And it is worth remembering, in this era of resurgent anti-Semitism, that they did so with a heavy Jewish accent.

*Martha Bayles, who teaches humanities at Boston College, is the* CRB*'s columnist on television and film.*


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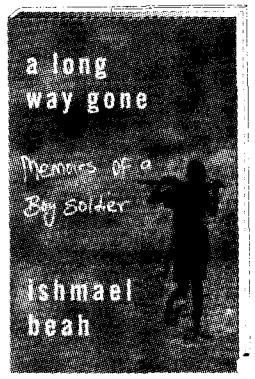


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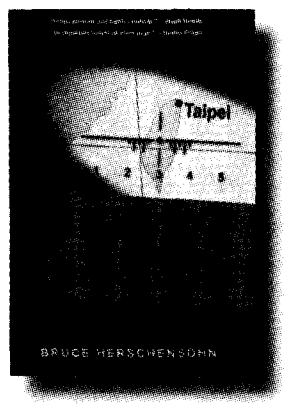


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PARTHIAN SHOT

by Mark Helprin

# China as a Rising Nuclear Power

BEFORE PRECIPITATE RELIEF OVER DÉTENTE WITH KIM JONG IL, it might be useful to remember that during previous such arrangements his countrymen built a number of nuclear weapons and carried out a test. Also, North Korea, with its rich chemical and biological arsenal having long ago neutralized American tactical weapons on the Peninsula, is embarked solely upon a program of survival by extortion, and it will gladly forfeit a power it does not need in exchange for recognition and some essential commodities to carry it over. The Asian nuclear power of which we must take account is not North Korea but China.

The forerunners of China's present government were able to defeat Chiang Kai-shek, fight the U.S. to a draw in Korea, and, merely by means of their country's looming potential, help to defeat America in Vietnam. This they did in chaos, poverty, and without modern arms, but with strategy bred in the bone. Since 1978, the Chinese have deliberately modeled themselves on the Meiji (who rapidly transformed feudal Japan into an industrial state able to vanquish the Russian fleet at Tsushima), by using China's extraordinary and sustained economic and technical growth to build military capacity.

In altering their position relative to that of the United States they have received generous assistance from the two most recent American presidents, who have accomplished first a carefree diminution of our orders of battle; and then the uniquely incompetent deployment of what was left, in a campaign analogous to losing a protracted war to Portugal. China advances and we decline because, among other things, its vision is disciplined and clear, while ours is burdened by fear, decadence, and narrow officials who understand neither Chinese grand strategy nor its nuclear component.

This has led the United States unwittingly to encourage China to move toward nuclear parity. In the next five years, as we reduce our arsenal from 10,000 strategic warheads to 1,700, China's MIRV'd silo-based missiles (i.e., those equipped with multiple, independently targeted warheads) and imminent generations of MIRV'd mobile and sea-based ICBMs will easily allow a breakout from current warhead numbers now variously estimated over a range of 80 to 1,800.

Once, the vast imbalance (in 1987, 500:1) might have discouraged China from such augmentation, but no longer. Our reductions and their growth provide them with fewer targets for more missiles, and will thus create the possibility and therefore the temptation, however remote, of a first strike. As we have cut the stable sea-based leg of our nuclear deterrent from 37 ballistic missile submarines to 14, China works to build its own and a fleet that can provide protected bastions at sea as well as hunt down the handful of American boats on station.

Nuclear competition between mature and newly emerging powers is neither unprecedented nor unexpected, but the rule has always been that if nuclear potential exists it must be countered. Although we may no longer subscribe to this, China does. Aware that the United States planned to use nuclear weapons had China violated the Korean armistice, China would understandably seek nuclear balance, if not preponderance.

The danger lies not solely in quantitative instabilities, but in potential nuclear strategies that technical evolution has elevated above Cold War paradigms. It is one thing for a few experts in the military or salted away impotently in think tanks to foresee these strategies but quite another to obtain from a people no longer confident of its right to self-defense the political consensus, appropriations, and authority to counter them. Consider just one scenario, highlighted by the recent successful test of China's anti-satellite weapon, part of a strategy to exploit technological asymmetries.

Armed conflict between the United States and China may now seem as unimaginable as most wars before they begin, after which what seems unimaginable is their end. But given China's appetites and our alliances and interests, a war is not inconceivable in Taiwan, or in Korea, where it has occurred within living memory. To remove American nuclear escalation from the equation, China would not need parity but only a deterrent such as it has long possessed. The Chinese, however, who like the Russians think differently about nuclear weapons and whose nuclear thresholds are dissimilar to ours, would have other options.

They know that every facet of America's economy, military, and society is critically dependent upon individual and networked electronic devices. Were these to fail all at once and irreparably, the nation would seize up, and, lacking the necessary prosaic machinery and methods, remain that way perhaps for years.

Faced with victory, or with loss, they might choose to—and who would venture to guarantee that they would not?—detonate half a dozen high megatonnage nuclear charges in the mesosphere, in an electro-magnetic pulse (EMP) strike perhaps not even in American airspace, cooking almost every circuit and semiconductor, rendering the American government blind, deaf, and dumber than it is already, and the country unable to resist the inroads that would surely follow on every front.

THOUGH WE WOULD UNDOUBTEDLY RESPOND IN KIND, CHINA IS not as technically dependent as are we. Nor, given its sufficiency for a counterstrike, could we deter an EMP attack with the prospect of massive retaliation, especially because an EMP strike, with no immediate casualties, would seem as peaceful as snow in still air.

The trick in nuclear strategy is to maintain stability by balancing potentials, and thus to discourage madness and events from converting the hypothetical to the actual. Required in this particular case, which is only one of many, is the electronic hardening, redundancy, and redesign of essential systems and networks; and missile defense, which would not only close the first-strike window by shielding our second-strike capacity from destruction, but protect against an EMP strike directly, and dissuade China in the first place by making its deterrent less certain.

Were we to proceed carefully along these lines, we could diminish the chances that China might in the not-so-distant future be tempted to win a nuclear war without fighting a nuclear war. But given that we have ignored the explicit warnings of the congressionally chartered EMP commission, what are the chances that we will act upon an opinion we dare not even form? In regard to war and the sometimes counterintuitive measures for avoiding it, we are no longer either confident or clear-sighted. What a pity to have come so far and then to find that our rivals and enemies all over the world can run rings around us because half of our politicians have lost their intelligence and the other half have lost their nerve.



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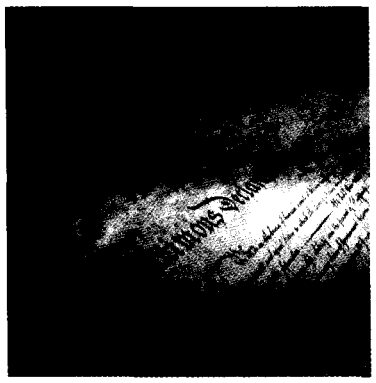

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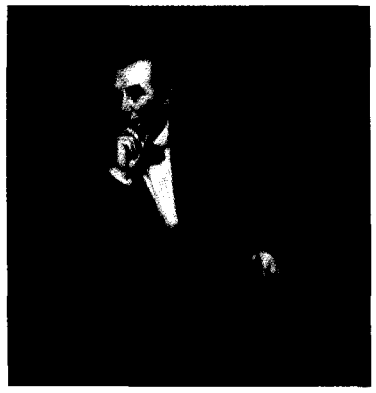

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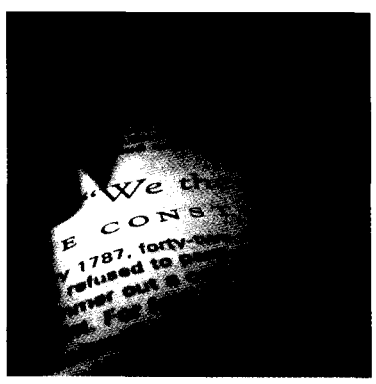

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# IN THIS ISSUE

ONE WOULD HAVE to go back to the Reagan era, and before that to the 1960s, to find Republican leaders opposing major government programs on constitutional grounds.

But the alternative to reviving constitutionalism is to make policy with no limits except for the judges' whims, and with no guide except our leaders' visions, distilled from their constituents' desires. The alternative to constitutionalism, in other words, is to play politics according to the Democrats' rules. That's a losing game.

Charles R. Kesler
"Bring Back the Constitution"

THE CENTRAL DIVIDE IN our time lies between those who believe that the heart of the American proposition consists in its dedication to universal principles of natural right, and those who deny that any such principles exist. Broadly speaking, the former camp includes everyone from Thomas Jefferson and Abraham Lincoln to Harry V. Jaffa and the late John Paul II.... Among those who belong to the latter school may be found most teachers of constitutional law in our time and, alas, most members of the Supreme Court.

Michael M. Uhlmann
"A Tell-All with Nothing to Tell"

RISING COLLEGE enrollments and falling teaching loads have led to an explosion in the number of college faculty writing books over the past two generations, and I wonder whether, as a consequence, we are doing *too* much research on some topics. Every young professor who rehashes old issues has to find a new angle to distinguish his work...and as the number doing this grows, the new angles grow ever more distant from facts and reality. Young historians in particular latch on to trendy scholarly preoccupations and try to retrofit the past to satisfy the intellectual fixation *du jour*.

Richard Vedder
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